What do you fear? We all have our personal fears. Children are often afraid of the dark. Some people are afraid of speaking in public. Many are afraid of heights. Maybe you have a fear of the past - that something you did long ago will catch up to you. Hypochondriacs have a fear of bad health. Some people just plain worry.

Fear is a part of our lives. We all live with one kind of fear or another. Some fear is good, in particular, the fear of awe and respect. You want children to be afraid of being hit by a car so they will not play in the street. That kind of fear keeps us out of trouble. But some fear is not good. Some fears are unhealthy. You have heard of phobias: the fears that keep people from living happy and productive lives. Maybe you remember Howard Hughes. He was a famous millionaire, aviator and movie producer. Later in life, his fear of germs made him a prisoner in his own home.

On Easter Sunday evening, the disciples were prisoners of fear. Last Sunday, we read about Jesus' resurrection on Easter morning. Peter and John went to the tomb and found it empty. John tells us that they saw and believed. But that same evening, John tells us: The disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews. They were so afraid they forgot the importance of what happened that morning. Fear was destroying their faith. It was destroying their confidence in everything Jesus had promised. Fear turned the disciples - the bold missionaries Jesus sent to preach the kingdom of God - into cowards hiding in their room.

What they needed was peace - the peace of a restored faith in a living Savior. We need that same peace to conquer our fears. We learn today that JESUS GIVES US HIS PEACE. We have that peace by his resurrection and with his forgiveness.

The disciples had locked the doors. They were frightened. Then, all of a sudden, Jesus was in the room. Luke tells us that the disciples were so terrified they thought they had seen a ghost. They were not expecting him. They did not recognize him - until Jesus said: Peace be with you! The disciples needed Jesus' peace. They were afraid. Their doors were locked. Nevertheless, Jesus was with them now, greeting them with the friendly Shalom, Peace! After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. Yes, it is really me. I am the one you saw die on the cross. I am alive and I am here.

Sometimes we feel alone and frightened like the disciples. Work piles up. We have problems at home. Car problems. Health problems. Perhaps death strikes someone close to you. It is frightening. You feel helpless, maybe even hopeless. Nothing is going right. You want to lock your door like the disciples did. Keep all the problems outside.

The disciples needed the peace Jesus brought with his resurrection, and so do we. We know he is alive. We know he lives for us. That is why we love to sing: He lives to silence all my fears; / He lives to wipe away my tears. We have peace because Jesus lives. We are not alone, he is with us. His Word gives us strength and comfort when we are in trouble. He tells us: I am with you always. Cast all your care on me, I care for you. I will never leave you or forsake you.

John tells us that The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. When Jesus was arrested and was crucified, their hearts were broken. Think of how you felt the
last time one of your loved ones died. When Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit on the cross, it looked like the devil won.

Think of how it must have changed what the disciples thought about Jesus. All Jesus said about himself must have seemed empty. Remember what Jesus said to Martha at the tomb of Lazarus: **I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.** Remember what Jesus said on Maundy Thursday: **I am the way and the truth and the life.** Those words must have seemed empty, like a warranty from a company that went out of business.

But Jesus was alive. **The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.** They had his peace because he was with them and because they knew that his promises were true. His resurrection is the guarantee of everything he said. St Paul tells us that Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection. He calls Jesus the **firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** He says: **For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.**

When Jesus said, **Peace be with you,** it meant more than a simple **Hello.** Remember, they ran when he was in trouble. When Jesus said, **Peace be with you,** he was showing his love for them, although they ran away. His peace was the peace of his forgiveness. Do you forget the peace of Christ's forgiveness and try your own solutions for sin?

Perhaps you try to ignore guilt or forget sin. You tell yourself that your faults, your shortcomings, or your weaknesses are not that bad - or that you are not as bad as someone else. You try to convince yourself that you had a right to say what you said about your neighbor. You convince yourself that your anger toward your neighbor is justified. St John wrote: **If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.** The guilt is still there. When we ignore our guilt, we tell the Savior: **I don't need your work. I'm not bad enough.**

Or maybe you concentrate on your guilt. You fall into despair over your sin, guilt, and weakness. The devil tempts you to believe that nothing could be worse than what you did. When you depress yourself with guilt, you tell the Lord: **I'm too wicked to be forgiven.**

Either way you throw the Savior's work back into his face. Either way you will have no peace with yourselves or with God.

We need Christ's solution. We need to hear Christ's words of forgiveness: **Peace be with you.** We call Jesus the **Prince of Peace** because he took the punishment that brought us peace. By his wounds we are brought back to our heavenly Father. Take yourself back to that locked room. Jesus says: **Peace be with you** and shows you his hands and his side. The scars of the nails and the spear are reminders of his work on the cross. When he gives us his peace, he gives us what he won for us.

Jesus gave his disciples peace and forgiveness - peace and forgiveness won by his suffering and death. Peace and forgiveness guaranteed by his resurrection. But Jesus' forgiveness did not stop with the peace he gave his disciples. Jesus gave his disciples a mission of peace. **Again Jesus said, Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.** And with that he breathed on them and said, **Receive the Holy**
Spirit. if you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. The forgiveness we give each other is just as valid as if it came from Jesus himself. In fact, it does come from Jesus - through us.

Jesus wants us to share his forgiveness. Remember **As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.** Every Christian has a mission to share Christ's forgiveness. We share forgiveness when we share the faith. When we tell somebody about Jesus, we tell them that Jesus paid the price for their sins. We are sharing forgiveness when we share the faith. It is just as important for us to share forgiveness with one another. When we say **I forgive you,** the forgiveness comes from Christ himself. That is true for every Christian, not just pastors.

The peace Jesus brings through his resurrection and with his forgiveness is a wonderful peace. But how often do we ignore it? **Yes, he lives to silence all my fears and to calm my troubled heart,** but I need real help right now. The peace of the living Savior does not put a new starter in my car or bread on my table. It is just like the disciples. They knew Christ's promise, **in three days I will rise again.** But they still locked the doors for fear of the Jews. Christ's peace does not always seem practical.

The problem is not with Christ. It is with our priorities. If our relationships are our top priority, then a personal squabble seems like a disaster. If entertainment is our priority, missing a favorite TV program seems like a catastrophe. The reason we do not find peace is we are looking for it in the wrong places. Step back and look at your life. What is really important? Your relationship to your God or your personal interests? Supporting the work of God's kingdom or getting that second big screen TV or that boat? **Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

Christ took care of your worst problem of sin and guilt on the cross. He won your peace with God. That is the only peace you really need. Amen.

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