

Peace Be With You! John 20:19-23

“Peace be with you.” The first words out of His mouth are words of peace. And unlike our words, His words carry divine weight. They do what they say, just as they did in the beginning of Genesis where God spoke and it was so. “Let there be light,” and Light there is. Peace be with you, and peace there is. This is the peace the world cannot give, the peace Jesus promised to His disciples before His death, the peace that comes because of His death. This is no idle wish. He shows them His hands and His side. This is the source of His peace – His wounds, the marks of His death. By His death He conquered Sin and Death. By His death He reconciled the world to His Father. By His death comes a peace that surpasses our understanding.

They were glad. Who wouldn't be? It was the Lord. You couldn't mistake Him. He's the one with the wounds. He died and rose, just as He said He would. He has the wounds to prove it. Whatever sorrow and fear they had melted away instantly. His words and wounds bring peace and joy.

“Peace be with you.” He says it again. Didn't the first time work? Of course it did! But now something more. He sends them. ***“As the Father sent me, even so I am sending you.”*** Jesus is the apostle of the Father, and now He sends His disciples as His apostles. Sent ones sent with His authority.

And then He breathes on them and says, ***“Receive the Holy Spirit.”*** A little preview of Pentecost. At Pentecost, the Spirit came on the whole church. Here, the apostles. This is their ordination. With His words and His breath, Jesus ordains them to be His authorized representatives, to speak in His stead and by His command. What He speaks and what He wants heard is the reason He died – forgiveness. The justification of the sinner. He wants forgiveness to be spoken. ***“If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”*** Their forgiveness is Jesus' forgiveness.

“Do you believe the forgiveness I speak to you is God's forgiveness?” That's a key sentence in the liturgy of private confession. You occasionally also hear it in the corporate confession perhaps like on Ash Wednesday or Maundy Thursday. It's a question of office and authority. Do you believe that the absolution you hear is from God Himself? Well, you should. It is authorized by the Lord Himself. His office, His words, His breath, His Spirit.

That's what the office of the holy ministry is all about. And it's all that it's good for. Forgiveness. Or, if you will not be forgiven, then withholding forgiveness. Sins forgiven and retained. We call it the “office of the keys,” the keys that lock and unlock heaven itself by applying the forgiveness that Jesus won for you with His words.

It's all about the words and the authority they carry. When the words come from the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, that pack divine authority. They are the same words that absolved the paralytic and raised him up from his mat walking that “you may know that God has given authority on earth to forgive sin.”

The words ***“I forgive you all of your sins”*** spoken in the stead and by the command of the Lord Jesus Christ are the surest words there are on earth. They come by way of the cross and the tomb. The come

with Jesus' breath in view of His wounds. They justify the sinner. They are Spirit and they are life, the words of eternal life. Learn to cherish them, believe them, cling to them. If you have nothing else but those words, you have all that Jesus died to win for you.

“Peace be with you.”