May 1, 11 Communion John 20:19-24

BECAUSE HE LIVES

Easter and Christmas are two holidays that have great meaning. They are both exciting times in the life of the church as well as our lives. One brings the joy of knowing how much God loved us by sending us his Son. We celebrate that love by giving gifts to one another remembering that gift that God gave to us was his son. We remember the angels singing and the shepherds rejoicing at visiting the manger and seeing the baby king promised by God. Now 33 years of so later we celebrate the joy of Easter knowing the tomb was empty and the Christ lives today. We shout both messages from the rooftops because they bring joy into our lives. We rejoice for God has heard our cries and has sent help. He hasn't left us alone, for the resurrection proves our Savior lives. One we celebrate his coming. The other we celebrate a different birth, his resurrection, his victory and our victory over death and the grave. As Easter people we raise our voices singing the resurrection songs for up from the grave he arose in victory. He not only defeated sin, but the grave. He not only defeated Satan, he opened heaven for all those who believe.

But those aren't the only two days or Sundays that are meaningful in our lives. Every day is meaningful. Every day is full of new life, new stories, and new opportunities to serve God, to grow

in our faith, to understand the gospel message.

Just about every year after Easter we hear stories about those who saw the risen Christ. We hear the story of doubting Thomas, and maybe even Peter's forgiveness story or the walk to Emmaus with the two stunned men. This morning I bring to you the resurrection story found in John's Gospel when Jesus came to a frightened group of men

to let them see he was alive and then he gave them a mission. Hear ye! Hear Ye! the Good News from John's Gospel: **John 20:19-24**

Later on that day, the disciples had gathered together, but, fearful of the Jews, had locked all the doors in the house. Jesus entered, stood among them, and said, "Peace to you." [20] Then he showed them his hands and side. The disciples, seeing the Master with their own eyes, were exuberant. [21] Jesus repeated his greeting: "Peace to you. Just as the Father sent me, I send you." [22] Then he took a deep breath and breathed into them. "Receive the Holy Spirit," he said. [23] "If you forgive someone's sins, they're gone for good. If you don't forgive sins, what are you going to do with them?" [24] But Thomas, sometimes called the Twin, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

Did you notice the joy the disciples had when they realized Jesus was alive? Did you notice the peace that came upon them? And how about Jesus? He didn't chew them out for going into hiding. He didn't even ask why any of them weren't at the cross when he died. He didn't question their loyalty. He didn't even ask Peter why he denied him three times. He didn't even mention Judas and his betrayal. He didn't even ask where Thomas was nor why they were huddled up in this place. That was not what this was all about. Three things happened that evening. First, they saw Jesus with their own eyes, heard his voice, and perhaps even touched his wounds. Second, he breathed into them the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity which would become active in their lives in a few weeks at Pentecost. And thirdly, he gave them their mission.

You see, because he lives we too, have stories to tell and missions to do. Many lives are altered through the resurrection story. That's why Easter is a great holiday. It reminds others that death is not the final word. Resurrection is. We are not hopeless people we are people with lots of hope. And that hope is a surety that because Christ has risen we too

shall one day rise again to a new life in a place where things will be different and there will be peace and love forever and ever. A place where there will be no more sin, nor illness, nor death any more. How do we know this? Because God has promised it. And What God promises will come to be. The song says 'because he lives we can face tomorrow.' Isn't that what we are looking for? The problems we have today can be erased with the hopes of tomorrow. Like Ron Santo so many times use to say when he was alive about the Cubs when they lost, "Let's go get them tomorrow."

We are all looking for hope of a better tomorrow. People without work hope to find a job tomorrow. People struggling with cancer hope for a cure tomorrow. Those just hit by the tornadoes are looking to rebuild. Businesses, homes, lives torn apart by these storms begin to regroup and think about starting over. Though our friends who were here a few weeks ago from Alabama didn't lose but a few branches on their trees, they, like many in North Alabama and elsewhere, lost power and hope to have it restored this week. Gas stations out. Food places out. Tough times are at hand. But not their hope. I am sure that in many churches tomorrow in Alabama, Georgia, and other states hit there will be sorrow for those who lost lives, homes, businesses. But I am sure there will be prayers of thanksgiving as well for those who survived those nasty storms. For them it will be tough, but God never said this life would be easy. He said only trust him.

As long as we have life there is always hope. Farmers today hope the rain will stop so they can get their crops in. Then they will hope for the right weather to make their crops grow. When harvest comes they hope the price will be such they can make some money, and also they will hope that they can get the crops out of the field.

The disciples didn't know what they were going to do now that Jesus had died. Those three years they followed Jesus they saw so many lives being transformed. Even their lives were transformed. Think of the hope that was given to those who were crippled

and could now walk again. Think of the change in lives those who were once blind could have now that they could see. And how about those lepers who were cleansed so that they were able to rejoin society and their families? And so many others who felt the touch of Jesus….lives restored to newness of life. A community of people who once were cast aside now had hope. On Easter there is the joy of new life, new hope, all because he lives. "He lives! He lives! Salvation to impart." That's the story of Easter, but more importantly, that's God's message for the world today. Because he lives we can face our tomorrows. Because he lives we have hope of eternal life.

Second thing that song tells us is that 'all fear is gone.' What fears? Well, for instance, maybe the fear of death. Just the other day I listened to a pastor on Bill O'Riely's show talking about heaven and hell. As usual I didn't catch the beginning of the show so I don't know his name or his denomination or the full scope of their conversation, but I do know he was a pastor. When asked if he believed in a literal hell he said no. When asked if he believed in heaven he sort of hemmed and hawed but did say he believed in heaven. That's when the show ended. How can you believe in one, if you don't believe in the other? Christ death and resurrection proves there is life after death. Those who believe in Jesus as the Scriptures have said, have no fear of death because they are promised eternal life with God. Aren't you glad that some sweet day we will share a meal around the banquet table in heaven? We sing about it. We read about it. We even dream about it. Heaven! The place where it will be perfect. Hell on the other hand is not perfect, and it certainly is talked about in Scripture, and we realize it isn't the place we want to spend eternity. But God still offers us the choice. You chose which place you will end up…..he offers his son….and it is up to you to say yes or no. Max Lucado in one of his books says that God had planned hell for the devil and his followers. His plan for all the rest of us was a place with him in heaven. But, sin entered this world when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command not to touch the fruit from the forbidden tree and sin entered that place

and all that was good was changed. That choice ended the perfect dream and Adam and Eve knew they sinned because they tried to hide from God. Their freedom was lost…they became bounded by sin. And ever since Satan has tried to entice more and more to disobey God and become his follower. While God keeps knocking on the doors of our hearts and offers us a transformation, a rebirth, a chance to do a do over in many ways. He says, believe in my son and you can have life. Believe in my son and all your fears will be gone. Love and trust cast out fear.

Many times we have heard words not to fear in the Scriptures. Can you imagine the disciples huddling in fear of the religious leaders on Sunday evening after they found the tomb empty? What might they have thought? They heard the story from the woman of how she found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. They didn't believe her. John and Peter rushed to find out the story was true. What happened when they got back? Was Peter confused? Did John try and remind the others of Jesus' promise that he would rise again? Was there much discussion? Were there doubters? I mean even today what has been our country focused on? Was Obama born in this country? Let me see his birth certificate I want to check to see if it is real, Trump says. "Let me see his wounds" Thomas says. "Let me touch them, put my fingers in them." Since they had never seen anyone who had risen except, and let's not forget, they all saw Lazarus live after 4 days in the grave. So why should they be so shocked? What were the buzz words going around? Could it be they were thinking, now what? Fear perhaps gripped them for now the religious leaders would be searching perhaps for them to find out how they stole the body of their friend. Maybe they took some of the guards and questioned them to find out who paid them to let them steal the body. So the disciples had plenty to fear. Add to that the fact they had only <u>heard</u> that the tomb was empty. Not one of them <u>had seen</u> the resurrected Jesus. So there they sit Sunday evening thinking, wondering, maybe even praying. Then out of nowhere a voice could be heard, "*Peace be with you!"* As all eyes

looked in the direction from which the sound of the voice came I bet there was a look of amazement as one of them blurted out, “It’s the Lord! It’s Jesus! He truly has risen.” I’m sure they all rushed off to see his wounds and touch him to make sure they weren’t all having hallucinations. But his voice was so calming and reassuring that all fears were gone. Praise the Lord! Jesus was alive!

Because he lives the Easter message goes on. For Christ is alive today and he lives in every heart that will invite him in. And the song is true….because he lives, we can face tomorrow….because he lives we have no more fears….because he lives…life truly is worth living…

So this morning at the table of grace remember that as you receive the elements, Christ is alive. His promise to be with us always, Amen