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Quasimodo Geniti (Second Sunday of Easter)

April 11, 2021

Text: John 20:19–31

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome some of the most important words ever written. They are life-changing and world-changing. Romans 1:16:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is God the Father's power for the salvation of believers. The Gospel works the forgiveness of sins. The Gospel gives hope, courage, and strength which transcend the trials and struggles of this world. The Gospel overcomes the devil's temptations and makes his demons flee. Through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit creates and sustains Christ's holy Church. On and on I could go. The Gospel is God's power for salvation. It is the most powerful force in the universe for it is established in the saving work of God Himself.

We Christians use that word a great deal. The Gospel. But do we know what we're talking about when we say "Gospel"? If a stranger on the street asked you what the Gospel is, what would you tell him? If the Gospel is, in fact, the power of God unto salvation – what I have said is the most powerful force in the universe – then we should know what the Gospel is!

Let's start by laying a good foundation. First, the word "Gospel" literally means "good news." The gospel in its broadest sense is basically an announcement of good news. When the Bible and Christians use the word Gospel, we are saying that we have good news, a good announcement to make about Jesus of Nazareth. Second, we also use the word Gospel to refer to four specific documents included in the New Testament. They are the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. There are other ancient documents called gospels, such as the Gospel of Thomas or the Gospel of Barnabas. But they do not qualify as Biblical gospels because they weren't written

under apostolic supervision and authority and, in most cases, they contain egregious doctrinal errors that are contrary to the Biblical Gospel of Christ Jesus. The Church has always known about them and rejected them for their errors. So, there are only four Gospels that the Church holds to be authoritative announcements of Good News about the birth, life, deeds, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Now we come to the heart of the matter. The word Gospel basically means good news and we have four documents that we call Gospels because they tell us about Jesus. So, what do we tell our hypothetical stranger what the Gospel is? I want to answer that question by using the appointed Gospel reading for today's service, John 20:19–31. The disciples of Jesus have gone through quite a roller coaster ride the past several days. Palm Sunday began with such excitement and fervor. It looked like Jesus might actually be recognized as Israel's king, at least by the citizens of Jerusalem. But then came the Passover celebration. Jesus changed it! Almost unthinkable. He took bread and said it was His body given for the forgiveness of sins. And then He took a cup of wine and said it was His blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. He commanded His disciples to eat and drink His body and blood often in remembrance of Him. A few hours later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas Iscariot returned with soldiers. They arrested Jesus; Judas had betrayed Jesus. And all of the other disciples fled in terror for their lives. Eventually, Jesus was examined by both Jewish and Roman authorities resulting in His scourging. And horror of horrors, Jesus was crucified unto death and buried. The disciples all watched these things unfold. Only John managed to pluck up enough courage to go Golgotha with Mary, the Lord's mother. They saw and heard Jesus' last breath. Joseph of Arimathea got Jesus' body from Pontius Pilate. He and Nicodemus hastily buried Jesus late Friday evening. Then came Sunday, Mary Magdalene and other women went to the tomb to give their last act of devotion of anointing Jesus body for permanent burial. But when the women arrived at the tomb early Sunday morning, they did not find the body of Jesus. And now they are saying His is risen from the dead! They've seen Him with their own eyes! Heard His voice! All of these things happened within a week's time, most of it, over three days, Friday through Sunday.

These details must be known if we are to understand what the Gospel is. And it explanation as to why the disciples were locked behind closed doors for fear of the Jews (John 20:19). They had witnessed strange events. Jesus was unjustly murdered. The Jewish authorities might come after the disciples next. And then, what to make of

the strange reports from the women who say Jesus is risen from the dead! Lots of fear on that first Easter evening.

Not unlike our day. Lots of fear on every hand. Many have noted that we are living in a glut of fearmongering. People from all walks and stations of life, from all political perspectives, rich and poor are spewing out constant messages of fear. Fear of this. Fear of that. Fear of them, those people, whoever they may be. Fear of one another. Fear of sickness, poverty, death. It's everywhere. As your pastor, it is my duty and responsibility to tell you that this outpouring of fear is demonic. The Lord Jesus taught that because of lawlessness the love of many will grow cold (Matt. 24:12). And the writer to the Hebrews proclaimed that Jesus died on the cross "that through death he (i.e., Jesus) might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who *through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*" The Lord came to release us from demonic fear that leads to lifelong slavery. Such deliverance from fear only comes through the Gospel. This is why we must know it and believe it.

Suddenly, according to vs. 19, Jesus stood in the midst of His fearful disciples and preached the Gospel to them, "Peace be with you." Vs. 20, "When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." Did you notice what brought joy? What dispelled fear and gave peace? The presence of the crucified yet living, resurrected Jesus! The Gospel has something to do with both the crucified and resurrected Jesus. Our Lord directed His disciples' attention to the wounds in His hands and side. Those marks aren't reminders of shame but of glory and love and salvation. They are marks of the Gospel which dispels fear and gives peace beyond human understanding.

Vs. 21–23, "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.'" Yet again, Jesus announces, preaches the good news of peace, the reception of the Holy Spirit, and the forgiveness of sins. The disciples, having been received those very gifts, the Holy Spirit, peace, and forgiveness, are now to go out into the world and preach the same message of peace, forgiveness, and the reception of the Holy Spirit unto salvation.

The Gospel, in its strictest, most basic and important sense, is the message, the good news that Jesus Christ, Son of God, came to this earth by taking upon Himself our

human nature for the purpose of saving sinners from sin, fear, death, the devil, and all evil by dying on the cross to atone for humanity's sins and rising from the dead to destroy the power of death. The Gospel is the message that God loves this world in and through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son Jesus. The Gospel is the message that because of Jesus God loves you and forgives you your sins and releases you from the fear and shame sin and death have brought to your lives.

This Gospel, that Jesus died and rose again to forgive and save sinners, is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. This Gospel gives peace and courage. It's why Christians throughout the ages have refused to bow their knees before the false gods of this world. The false gods that seek to subject us to the dominion of fear and shame. Christ Jesus has set us free by His life, death, and resurrection and we will not compromise or change this beautiful, powerful message. We proclaim what the prophet Isaiah saw through prophetic inspiration, "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation" (12:2).

Dear saints of God, this Easter season is a joyous proclamation of the Gospel. Jesus died and rose again! Proclaim that message to friend, family and foe. It's God's power of salvation. Jesus came into this world to save sinners by dying and rising again. This is God's love. Come to Church and bring your family, friends, and neighbors so that they too may receive His forgiveness, His love, His peace, and His Spirit. Come to receive and rejoice in the Gospel given to us in Word and Sacrament. The resurrected Jesus is here to give peace just as He did on that first Easter Evening! Baptism, preaching, Supper, absolution are the means of receiving the Gospel. Our hymns and liturgies set the Gospel to music. Our prayers are empowered by the Gospel. It is our joy and strength. The crucified and resurrected Jesus is the source and content of the Gospel. Fear not dear saints. Believe the Gospel of Jesus. And live in His divine, eternal peace.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.