

“You have this power” John 20:19-23

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 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 any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

Today we celebrate Pentecost or you can say that we celebrate the birthday of Christian Church, or that we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us. Many reasons to celebrate, many gifts to give thanks for.

Today, as we’ll meditate on words of Jesus as written down by apostle John, we’ll try to focus on what Jesus gave to His disciples. What was this unique thing that Jesus gave to His disciples and what does it mean for us today?

Let me ask you, - have you ever broken your promises? Have you ever not have done what you were expected to do? Has your unfaithfulness or forgetfulness, or weakness, or business, or laziness, etc. ever caused problems to others? Have you ever caused sufferings and hurt to others?

How did you feel after that? Can you recall these feelings. Many of us may still carry these feelings with us. Failure when someone needed us. Being away, being too selfish, not being good enough.

Don’t be scared to admit it, that’s the reality of our daily lives. Our consciences won’t leave us at peace, if we deny it. Guilt will haunt us days and nights. And sometimes it can last for years.

Now, this will help us to understand better what happened of that day, when Jesus appeared to His disciples. How did they feel that evening? Miserably could be good word to describe it.

Remember what they all said to Jesus just three days ago. Right before He was arrested. First it was Peter said who said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same. (Mat 26:35) Then few hours later they all run away, they all abandon their Teacher.

While He was arrested, tortured, executed, most of them where hiding and trying to save their lives. How could one feel after you have so miserable failed? Making

big promises, and braking them few hours later. Braking them to the one, whom you have followed for few years. Not a good feeling.

On top of that, they feared the Jews. That's clear, - why. The Jews had just arrested and crucified their leader, the one from whom they expected big things. The Kingdom of God, freedom. Now He was crucified and dead.

Their lives, the last three years appear to be just a waste of time. Worse, now when Jesus was killed, they could be the next on the list. Surely the Jews would be happy to get rid of these closest disciples as well. We can see the reason for their fear.

And as they were together suddenly, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." Peace be with you. We have talked about what is the meaning of this world. It comes from Hebrew 'shalom'.

It means total all-embracing wellbeing. Physical, psychological, spiritual, social, and so on. It is how you can describe God's design for our lives. To live in this peace. That's why apostle Paul begins his letters with "Grace and peace to you..."

Here He was, their Teacher, their risen Lord. Standing before them in flash. Jesus had a body. Physical body. Yes, it was different resurrected body, but it was still the same Jesus. He could appear in the midst of His disciples behind closed doors, but He was the same one, who was crucified and buried just three days ago.

He showed His hands and His side. And the disciples rejoiced. It is very concise description of what happened, but we can imagine how much was going on in disciples minds and hearts. Jesus had promised that He won't leave them alone as orphans, then He got killed, now He had kept His promise. He was back.

Yes, the Jews were still outside, waiting for them. But now their Lord was with them. They already had experienced that nothing can harm them, when He is with them. Neither people, nor evil spirits, nor even elements of nature.

He had been their peace, their shalom. What a joy and comfort it should have been for the disciples to have Him back. But then, when they realized that there is no reason for fear, the next problem came up ... remember how miserably they have failed their teacher just few days ago.

Now He is here with them, and He knows all of this and they need to look at His eyes. What is Jesus going to say? They knew they have been unfaithful. They knew they were guilty. What is Jesus going to say?

Then Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." Peace be with you. You are forgiven! What was broken by your weakness is restored. I know your worries, your guilt, your fears, - you are forgiven. Peace be with you.

What can be sweeter for the disciples! These words were a healing balm for their souls. You know how it works. When you have sinned against someone, there is only one way you can have a good conscience and peace again. You can't get in on your own.

You need to receive forgiveness. You can't forgive yourself. Only that person against whom you have sinned can forgive you. You need to hear it. You can go and ask for forgiveness, but ultimately it is in the hands of the one whom you have hurt. No one is entitled to forgiveness. It is always a gift. Very precious and undeserved gift.

The disciples couldn't forgive themselves their betrayal and cowardice. Only Jesus could do it. And He did. "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

Then Jesus "breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

These are the most wonderful words. With these words unbelievable authority is given to us. In fact, with these words Jesus shares His authority with His disciples, that is, with us. He effectively gives us authority to forgive sins on His behalf.

It is difficult to comprehend. True. When we sin, when we do something wrong, when we don't do what we are supposed to do, we sin first and foremost against God.

He has created us for specific life, to receive everything from Him and to serve with everything to our neighbor. And we fail to live that way all the time. We don't love God more than everything, and we don't love our neighbor as ourselves. That's why we have unsettled and bad consciences, that's why so many people try to avoid God. Not to be reminded of their guilt.

How can we have a good conscience? Only if God forgives us. Only if the One, who speaks in our hearts, who knows all our desires, thoughts, words and deeds, only if He forgives us, if we hear His forgiving voice.

This is exactly what Jesus gave His disciples. Authority to forgive on His behalf, and by His command. This is what we are called to do. This is why Jesus sent His disciples. This is why they sent their disciples. This is why we are sent.

To deliver this message of forgiveness. From God the Father, through Jesus to all the nations, to every person, to every person you meet. So that they can be restored in their relationships with God.

This is so important, and at the same time so unbelievable message. That's why it is given to us in so many ways. So that only you can get it and be assured that God the Father, your Creator and Redeemer indeed accepts you, forgives you and restores you because of what Jesus Christ did.

Everything we as Christians do is about forgiveness and restoration. Look at the divine service. Why do we come here? To admit that we have sinned and to hear what... yes, 'I forgive you all your sins, on behalf and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ.' Your sins are forgiven. You are God's beloved child.

We hear word of God preached, and again - the purpose of it is to assure that God the Father forgives you and accepts you as you are, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

When we receive the Lord's Supper, we receive the very Lord who gave up His life, who shed His blood for the forgiveness of your sins. Then we leave the Lord's house with these words 'the Lord bless you and keep you.. the Lord give you His peace.'

When we are baptized, again, we are baptized for the forgiveness of our sins. When we are particularly burdened, we are invited to private confession and forgiveness. Then a pastor delivers you personally this message – whatever you have done, whatever burdens and enslaves your - I forgive you all your sins.

Think about it, each of us, when we are baptized, received this authority. We can forgive the sins of our brothers and sisters if they are in need. Each of you can do it boldly on behalf of our Lord Jesus Christ, and whomever you forgive, their sins will be forgiven.

Today we celebrate Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit. You may wonder where in today's message is the place for the Holy Spirit? Everywhere. That's right, everywhere. Nothing of what we've been talking so far can happen without the Holy Spirit.

You see, every person experiences guilt and their conscience accuses them. And they may try to deny it, or to deal with it in different ways, but only the Holy Spirit can persuade them that they have sinned and are guilty against their Creator.

Only the Holy Spirit can clearly reveal how deeply spoiled we are and how rebellious against true God. Only the Holy Spirit can lead us to repentance.

We would not come to the Lord and wouldn't seek His forgiveness unless the Holy Spirit guides us. He leads us to Jesus and to the Father. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit we may believe and trust that God the Father indeed forgives us.

Only the Holy Spirit can give us a good conscience. Only the Holy Spirit can give us this peace which Jesus has prepared for us. For He is with us and dwells in us. That's Him, God the Holy Spirit.

We are here only because of the Holy Spirit. He is our Helper. Not in a sense that He helps us to do what we can do on our own, no, He helps us to do, what we couldn't do without Him.

To receive the Holy Spirit and the authority of Jesus to forgive the sins is unbelievable privilege, and it is also our mission. To restore this broken world by the power of forgiveness. We need to begin with ourselves.

We all need to hear this message again and again, - you are God's child, forgiven, chosen for eternal life, and nothing is going to change it. Nothing. Only when the Holy Spirit assures that God's love really applies to you, we can go and share it with others.

Then we are sent to go and restore relationships with people in our lives. It is not optional, and there is no excuse for not doing it. We are to step over our pride and ask for forgiveness, if we are guilty.

We are to put down our self-righteousness and go and offer forgiveness to those who may have sinned against us and don't have this power to ask for forgiveness.

This is how Jesus ministry of restoration continues through us. This is how peace of the Lord comes into this world. And when we do what we are sent to do, we may witness miracles happen.

We may witness relationships restored, we may witness lives transformed, and we may witness people being saved and coming to the knowledge of the truth, to the knowledge of the only true God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Come, Holy Spirit, be with us and make use of us!

Amen.