

Sermon Notes on Jn. 20:19-31, First Sunday after Easter

1. Our text is paralleled at Mk. 16:14-18 and Lk. 24:36-49. It was late evening of Easter Sunday. The group was composed of the disciples, those with them and the two Emmaus disciples. They were eating. Jn. tells us that Jesus gave them the power to forgive sins. Mk. tells us that Jesus gave the command to preach all over the world. Lk. tells us that He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. All three Gospels describe the fear and unbelief of the disciples and how Jesus scolded them for their unbelief. But He comforted them with the Gospel.
2. From His conception in Mary's womb until He died Jesus humbled Himself and did not display His divinity. He was true God at all times and had all the attributes of God. He proved it with His miracles and the transfiguration (Mt. 17:2-8). But from the moment that He became alive in His grave His human nature constantly used and still uses all the attributes of God. His human body appeared and disappeared. It passed through the stone at the grave. His human nature knew all things. Jn. 21:17. He promised: "Lo I am with you always." Mt. 28:20. His human nature is with us. He said: "All power has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Mt. 28:18. His human nature is almighty. His human nature is now glorified. Rev. 1:14-16. The Son of man will come again in glory. Mt. 25:31.
3. But even though Jesus is the exalted King of kings and Lord of lords He deals with us only with His Word, Law and Gospel. He proved that when He appeared to His disciples. They had disappointed Him. They did not believe as they should have. They were afraid even though He said many times: "Fear not." But He did not punish them. He scolded them for their unbelief. Mk. 16:14. But He also forgave their sins and comforted them. Jesus is our Savior, not a stern judge. On the last day He will come to judge the living and the dead. But now He is seeking and saving the lost. Lk. 19:10.
4. Jesus' greatest gift to us is the forgiveness of sins. When He said: "Peace be to you" He meant "I forgive you all your sins." Read Jn. 14:27. Jesus promised the church the peace of God, the forgiveness of sins. Jesus' second greatest gift to the church is the Office of the Keys, the power to forgive the sins of penitent sinners. See vs. 21-23 of our text. See also Mt. 16:19 and 18:18. All Christians have the power to forgive sins to penitent sinners and to withhold forgiveness from impenitent sinners. When a Christian congregation calls a man to be their pastor they ask him to exercise this power in their stead. He preaches and teaches. He baptizes and administers the Lord's Supper. He forgives their sins when they come to church and before they leave he pronounces a blessing on them, either the blessing of Aaron, Num. 6:24-26, or II Cor. 13:14 or Heb. 13:20-21 or I Thess. 5:23. Like Jesus the pastor is a servant not a boss.
5. Only Jn. tells us about unbelieving Thomas. The disciples had refused to believe Mary Magdalene, Mk. 16:11. Neither did they believe the two who went to Emmaus, Mk. 16:13. And so Jesus appeared to them Himself and reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, Mk. 16:14. But Thomas was more stubborn in his unbelief. He said that he needed specific proof. Jesus gently yielded to his request. Thomas believed. But then Jesus said: "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believe." Mary, Jesus' mother, was blessed because she believed. Lk. 1:45. The OT saints were blessed because they believed, Heb. 11:1-40, Jesus said: "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it." Lk. 11:28. Jn. 20:31 reads "These things are written so that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you have life in His name." And He says: "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Mk. 16:16.
6. The church exists only to bring people to faith in Jesus and to keep them in this faith to everlasting life.