

## Sermon for April 7, 2013 – Easter 2

### **John 20:19-31**

#### Theme: Shalom Aleychem!

- 1) *Jesus' Easter greeting to us.*
- 2) *Our Easter greeting to the world.*
- 3) *Through faith this greeting is more than a wish.*

<sup>19</sup> *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"* <sup>20</sup> *After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.* <sup>21</sup> *Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* <sup>22</sup> *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.* <sup>23</sup> *If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."* <sup>24</sup> *Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.* <sup>25</sup> *So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."* <sup>26</sup> *A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"* <sup>27</sup> *Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."* <sup>28</sup> *Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"* <sup>29</sup> *Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* <sup>30</sup> *Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.* <sup>31</sup> *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Shalom Aleychem! This common Hebrew greeting means: Peace be with you! The Hebrew word for “peace” (shalom) involves far more than the English word that describes it. Shalom encompasses ideas of prosperity, wealth, health, safety, unity, wholeness, peace, and, most importantly, a restored relationship with God. The idea of “shalom” is an integral part of Jewish culture. Wishing someone “shalom” has been the Jewish greeting for thousands of years.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples on that first Easter Sunday, his first words were: “Shalom Aleychem!”—“Peace be with you!” Jesus’ work made these words more than a wish. He made them a reality. Let us consider the peace Jesus won for us, under the theme: **Shalom Aleychem!** 1) *Jesus' Easter greeting to us.* 2) *Our Easter greeting to the world.* 3) *Through faith this greeting is more than a wish.*

#### Part 1: Jesus' Easter greeting to us.

Our text begins: <sup>19</sup> *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"* <sup>20</sup> *After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

Many of the disciples had already seen Jesus. They understood that He was alive, but in the excitement of the moment, one wonders if they fully believed it. Jesus appeared to strengthen them. He stood among them and said: “Shalom Aleychem -- peace be with you!” Jesus came to this earth to win peace for believers. But what exactly is the peace that Jesus came to win?

The opposite of peace is being at war - and, at one time, we were all at war with God. Let me explain what I mean: Whenever a person does not do what God wants him to do, or does what God does not want him to do, he sins – he rebels against God. Sin shows that we do not respect God; it shows that we, according to our sinful nature, actually hate Him.

Now many people would disagree with what I just said. Even my unbelieving friends would say that they do not hate God. But the truth of the matter is that the more a person sees how righteous God is, and how, even the slightest sinful thought damns a person to hell, the more his heart begins to hate God. I once met a man who claimed to be a Christian, but did not believe that God would send anyone to hell. He said, “If God would do that, I would not want to have any part with Him.” This man's response shows how human nature hates God's justice.

Because of sin, humans live in fear of both God and his punishment. To try to calm their fears, some try to change God into someone not quite as righteous as the Bible says he is. Others try to deny the existence of God. Still others try to put God out of their minds by focusing on the pleasures of this world, or by going on some quest to improve humanity. All these things may give a person false comfort, but, just as morphine numbs pain but doesn't cure cancer, so also these false comforts do not change the fact that God is righteous and we are sinful.

But Jesus came to this earth to win peace for us. In order to win our peace with God, he had to suffer God's righteous anger for us. And this is what Jesus did! Jesus showed the disciples his wounds from the cross. His wounds are like battle scars, showing that he went to war against our sins for us. His resurrection shows that the war is over. Forgiveness has been won. Now there is peace.

Shalom Aleychem. What great news Jesus had for his disciples! Nevermore would they have to be afraid of God's righteous anger. Nevermore would they have to despair because of their sins. All sin is forgiven in Christ. Through faith, we have a restored relationship with God. Through Christ, we have been made whole and are righteous. In Christ, we have Shalom!

## Part 2: Our Easter greeting to the world.

Our text continues: <sup>21</sup> *Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* <sup>22</sup> *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

Even though the disciples were overjoyed to see Jesus, they were still afraid that the people who killed Jesus would come after them. Jesus did not want his disciples to be afraid. They had Shalom with God. Jesus wanted them to take courage in that peace. This is why he repeats his “Shalom Aleychem.” He had an important assignment for his disciples: to tell the world about the peace God offers us in Christ. They were to be His ambassadors to the world.

An ambassador is someone who has special authority to speak on behalf of the government he represents. Jesus gave this authority both to the disciples and his entire church. He gave the Holy Spirit, not only to remind us of the peace that we have with God, but to share that peace with the world. How are we to share that peace with the world? By telling people that their sins are forgiven in Christ Jesus!

Only God has the authority to forgive sins, and, in Christ, everyone's sins are forgiven. God offers this shalom to all, and he uses us to proclaim it. If anyone is sorry for their sins, and trusts in Jesus for forgiveness, we can tell that person: “Shalom Aleychem -- peace be with you. You don't have to be afraid

anymore. God forgives you and is at peace with you.” When we announce this peace of forgiveness to the penitent sinner, know that the Holy Spirit speaks through us and makes this announcement a reality.

Unfortunately, there are people who do not want to be at peace with God. They do not want to believe they are sinful and need a Savior. To such people we cannot announce Christ's Shalom; rather we must tell them that, in rejecting their Savior, they are rejecting their salvation. Their sins remain. Unless they repent and trust in Jesus for forgiveness, they will go to hell when they die. When we say this to someone, it is not only we who say it, but the Holy Spirit, who says it through us. Now certainly this message is not too popular, and one that we don't want to tell others. It might not seem loving to an unrepentant sinner to tell them that they are not at peace with God. But, if we truly love that person, we will tell them the truth so that they can repent and have peace. Jesus commands that we speak the truth in love, so that the person we speak it to may know the danger he is in.

Part 3: Through faith this greeting is more than a wish.

Thomas, was not with the disciples when Jesus showed himself alive and announced his: Shalom Aleychem. In spite of the fact that more than 11 of his closest friends, all of whom were very trustworthy, told him that his Savior was alive, he did not want to believe it. He set his own demands as to how and when he would believe.

Thomas serves as an example of doubt and unbelief. Pride in himself and in what he thought was reasonable, prevented him from believing. We too have this pride in us. Sinful pride sometimes hinders us from accepting the fact that Jesus paid for our sins. “I just sinned. I can't go to my Savior in repentance now. I have to do something first to prove that I truly am sorry.” “I know my friends say that I am forgiven. My pastor says the same thing. But how can this be true if I don't feel it?” Sometimes our doubts even go so far as to make demands from God. “God, if you truly love me, you will let my friend be healed of his illness. If you truly love me, you will let me get this job.” It is never right for us to question God's love and base it on some earthly thing we want. God has already demonstrated his love for us in giving us his Son. Horrible is the prayer that puts God's love into question. It, in effect, declares Christ's sacrifice as worthless.

Mercifully, Jesus reveals himself to Thomas so that he might believe. Jesus did not have to do this. But, out of pure grace, Jesus confronts Thomas. He does this to call Thomas to repentance.

*Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"<sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*

Thomas finally believed! Jesus is his Lord and his God. Jesus is the one who gives genuine Shalom - genuine peace.<sup>29</sup> *Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Faith does not come through seeing miracles or having scientific evidence. Faith is a creation of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the person who hears God's Word. We are the ones Jesus told Thomas about -- those who believe even though they have not physically seen Jesus. What are we blessed with? The same thing that Thomas and the rest of the disciples were blessed with: Shalom -- peace with God!

We receive this peace only through faith. We receive our faith only by means of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel. The main purpose of God's Word is not to get us to keep the 10 Commandments. It is not to tell us how to live a better life. The main purpose of the Bible is to create faith in our hearts, so that we see Jesus is our Savior, and have shalom: peace, unity, safety, wholeness, prosperity, and a restored

relationship with God. St. John writes: <sup>31</sup> *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Shalom Aleychem! This is Jesus' wonderful Easter greeting to us. This is our Easter greeting to the world. Through faith, this greeting is more than a mere wish! Praise be to Christ, who has given us this wonderful Shalom! Amen.