Goal: That the hearers would be live the peace that the risen Christ gives.

An artist was commissioned by a wealthy man to paint something that would depict true peace. After considerable thought, the artist painted a beautiful, tranquil beach, with the sun shining and a few soft, fluffy white clouds scattered in the sky. There was a hammock hanging between two palm trees and the waves were gently rolling over the reef and mildly onto the beach. The artist gave the picture to the man, but he was disappointed. “This isn’t a picture of true peace. Try again.” The artist went back to his studio and contemplated peace again for several hours, then he began to paint. When he was finished, there on the canvas was a beautiful picture of a mother, holding a sleeping baby, smiling lovingly at the child. He thought, this surely was a picture of true peace, and he hurried to give it to the wealthy man. But again, the man refused the painting.

The artist was discouraged, he was tired, disappointed, and he was angry. Again, he thought, even prayed for inspiration to paint a picture of true peace. Then, an idea came. He rushed to the canvas and began to paint as he had never painted before. When he finished, he hurried to the wealthy man and gave him the painting. The man studied it carefully and the artist held his breath. “Now this is a picture of true peace.” The wealthy man accepted the painting, paid the artist, and everyone was happy.

What was this picture of true peace? It was a picture of a stormy sea pounding against a cliff. The artist had captured the fury of the wind as it whipped black rain clouds laced with streaks of lightening. The sea was roaring, waves churning, and the dark sky filled with the power of the ferocious thunderstorm. In the middle of the picture, under a cliff, the artist had painted a small bird, safe and dry in her nest snuggled safely in the rocks. The bird was at peace midst the storm that raged about her. True peace.

Jesus came to the disciples amidst the confusion of the resurrection and the chaos and fears of their lives. (“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.” (John 20: 19) Like that mother bird, Jesus came to the disciples while they were overwhelmed with the stormy seas of life and said, “Peace be with you.”

Now, let’s get a feel for the situation. The disciples were crowded into a room with doors locked. They had heard that Jesus’ body was no longer in the tomb but to believe that He was risen and alive, that was a stretch. They were terrified of the Jews that what happened to Jesus might also be their fate. So they sat sulking, arguing, and feeling overwhelmed. When suddenly, Jesus appears in their midst, “Peace be with you.”

I’d imagine they might have said, “Is it really you?” To prove it, “When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.” (John 20: 20) His hands that bore the
marks of the nails, his side where the spear pierced and water and blood flowed. And
“The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.” Can you imagine their joy? They had been cautiously hoping that Jesus had risen, and standing right in the middle of them, was Jesus, alive. Their joy, relief, and excitement, was a result of the fact that fear had been lifted from their hearts. The sadness of Friday had turned into joy.

Jesus came and filled his disciples with peace, like a big breath of air releasing from their lungs. A peace that relived their grief, calmed their fears, and filled them with the joy of the resurrection. But with that peace, came a purpose, that of bringing peace to others. 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.” (John 20: 21 – 23) The peace of Easter was not only for the disciples but for all who are struggling and living in fear.

As a pastor, this is my calling and responsibility, to speak Christ’s words to you, “Your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...peace be with you.” The primary role of a pastor, is not to preach inspirational sermons or provide entertainment for 10 minutes or to chant the liturgy perfectly or to be an award winning author, but to speak God’s forgiveness through the redeeming blood of Jesus. To bring peace to the troubled soul is something that nothing in this world could ever do.

It was Monday evening when the phone rang. It was Mike and he had been wrestling with tremendous guilt. He’d been raised Lutheran but had fallen away over the years, but following a deployment, he began experiencing terrible migranes. He had taken medication after medication, riding a rollercoaster of side-effects and withdrawls. Finally, he went to try a new age style of medicine saying, “I’ll do anything to get rid of this pain.” Thankfully, his physical pain was reduced but his life went into a downward spiral. They were losing their home, his job was on the rocks, his relationship with his children was crumbling, and his medical complications were growing with few answers, only more questions and tests. I could hear it in His voice. He was anxious, exhausted, and terrified that the root of his problems was God punishing him for his bad choices.

My heart went out to him, and the words of Jesus came from my lips to His ear. “God is not punishing you. He already punished Jesus for your sins and mine. God loves
you and I love you. What you are facing today is not a result of God’s judgment, but a consequence of living in this sin-filled, corrupt world. But Jesus has overcome this world. That’s the message of Good Friday and Easter. Don’t ever doubt God’s love for you in Christ! He will bring you through.” “But how do you know God isn’t punishing me?”

Thomas had that same disbelief. It’s natural as we struggle with the fears and uncertainties of life, whether it is the fear of IRS or results of medical tests or a marriage that’s falling apart or the uncertainty of the economy. How can we be sure that God is in control and will bring us through? “Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20: 26 – 28) Jesus came to His disbelieving disciple and showed him the marks of His forgiveness and love. Thomas was at peace and He was reassured of God’s love to Him.

I assured Mike that if He ever doubted God’s care for him, just look to the cross as proof of God’s love and forgiveness. He could also look to the baptismal font and see where God’s grace was applied to Him and where God made him His beloved child. And he could look to the altar to where Christ’s body and blood are broken and given to him. These marks are where God bestows His peace. Mike was now at peace and he thanked me, then we ended the call.

And that’s the message for each of us as well. If you ever feel overwhelmed by life and fear that everything is out of control, look to the cross, the font, and His altar and know that Jesus died so that you would be forgiven, so that you would have peace. Here are the marks of your salvation, “do not disbelieve, but believe!”

The disciples abandoned their doubts and fears in the peace that comes through the everlasting arms of our Savior and they became powerful messengers of reconciliation, sharing the Gospel of forgiveness with others. Mike let go of his guilt and experienced true peace in Christ and his life and family have become stable upon the sure footing of God’s love. What about you? Every Sunday, Jesus says to you, “Peace be with you.” Therefore, no matter what storms you’re facing, no matter what troubles or uncertainties are pressing against you, no matter how dark and scary the storm clouds of life, receive Christ’s peace, and realize that Jesus is empowering you to go out into the world in peace and to be peacemakers by forgiving one another with the love of Jesus Christ. Amen.