



Easter 3 – April 13-14-15, 2024

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: Thank God for His Easter Sequel

Sermon Text: John 20: 19-31

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." ²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus^{us}), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ 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!" ²⁷ 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." ²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Dear Sons and Daughters of the Risen King Jesus,

Back in college, I remember watching movies with my friends. What kind of movies do you like to see? We spent our Friday nights on the campus of Northwestern College renting Hollywood hits from the local video store. That's right – no streaming video for us; think *Blockbuster Video* – old school. I bet your family still has some of those VHS tapes somewhere in your grandma's basement. Now, maybe it was because we lived in a small Wisconsin town or because none of us had a car, but we watched the good ones so many times that we could quote you any movie line you wanted. We watched *Monty Python*, *Ghostbusters*, or even *Top Gun* – the original one with Maverick and Goose. When I think about it now, these movies were good times, but they never really changed us, or made our lives any better. I suppose they helped us with movie trivia once in a while. They kept us out of trouble by giving us a distraction. But, that was about it.

The one thing we did learn from those movies was that if Hollywood had a box office hit, it was sure to be repeated. Here's what I mean. There wasn't just *Star Wars*. Oh no! There had to be an *Empire Strikes Back* and a *Return of the Jedi* and then six more *Star Wars* movies after that. There wasn't just a *Back to the Future*, there was a *Back to*

the Future II & III. It wasn't enough to have a Rocky I or II, there had to be a Rocky III, IV, X! You get the picture.

Sometimes, as Christians, we hear the true account of Easter week after week and year after year. We know Jesus' resurrection so well that we can recreate the scene of the empty tomb, and quote many of the Easter lines with amazing detail, but then suddenly our celebration stops. Just two week ago, our Easter worship swelled in the sanctuary with both the music and the message of *I Know that My Redeemer Lives*. But, since then, our schedules at work and school have pretty much returned to normal. Our Easter joy can easily be lost. You know, Jesus was concerned about that with His first century disciples in our sermon reading. Jesus knows the human heart -- He had one too. He knows about human doubts, fears, and worries, and in our case human guilt that can be so deadly. So Jesus did something about restoring that Easter joy for His people then, and today. He gave us His Easter sequel. His sequel was a continuing reminder that sin doesn't ever have to control us: because He lives. It was a continuing reminder that Satan never need own us, because He lives. And it was a continuing reminder that death never need scare us, because He lives. Our Easter worship location may have changed temporarily from the sanctuary to this Fellowship Hall. But, the Easter victory we celebrate never needs to change -- not now and not ever. So don't let the devil take it away from you. On this sequel Saturday/Sunday/Monday known in the liturgical church year as Easter 3, let's **Thank God for His Easter Sequel**. It's a sequel first of all that gives us lasting peace. And it's a sequel that gives us lasting faith.

What do you expect out of a sequel? You want something original. You want a continuation of the story: what happens next. And of course, you'd like a happy ending. Jesus gives us all of that and more in His Easter sequel -- much more. Is God original in his plan to save us? Just listen to St. Paul tell us in 1 Corinthians, chapter 2: ***What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived -- the things God has prepared for those who love him, -- these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2: 9-10)***. In other words, Hollywood has nothing original compared to God. And, the Gospel writer John sums up why this Easter sequel was preserved these 20 centuries. It wasn't saved to give anyone earthly fame and fortune. Instead, as John says: ***But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:31)***. Talk about the ultimate happy ending for every man, woman, teen and child -- heaven for every believer. You know the best thing about God's Easter sequel? It's not just more proof that the tomb of Jesus is empty, and so one day, our tombs will be empty too. It's not just more evidence that Jesus really was telling the truth: that He's truly the Son of God and Savior of the world. No, the best part of Jesus' sequel is that He did all this for us, and for the people we need to reach with the Gospel. So let's **Thank God for His Easter Sequel**.

Our sermon reading begins this way: ¹⁹ ***On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with***

you!" ²⁰ *After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.* ²¹ *Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* ²² *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."* It was still Easter evening. Instead of hightailing it back to Galilee like the angel at the tomb told them to go, the disciples were behind locked doors. They were scared to death. They realized that since the Jews weren't afraid to kill Jesus, they would be next. They were confused and paralyzed. Then, Jesus shows up. I'm sure you could've heard a pin drop. He knew exactly what they needed. Three times, Jesus said it: ***Peace be with you.*** Jesus wasn't offering them any short-term earthly peace, but eternal peace. He was freely offering them the kind of peace that we sing about at Christmas: *Peace on earth and mercy mild: God and sinner reconciled.* He was offering them free and full forgiveness.

That offer is still on the table for us today. The opposite of peace is war. When you think about it, Satan lost the war at Easter. He couldn't defeat the Son of God. Yet, He doesn't give up. He tries to con us into thinking: "you know that sin that you committed. Yea, God can't ever forgive that one." Guilt of past sins can not only haunt us, it can hold us captive for years: ruining relationships and make us fearful every day. We need release from this kind of captivity. One of my favorite movies is ***The Patriot***, a movie set in Revolutionary War times. What amazed me about this movie is how it describes the true cost of freedom. With the Revolutionary War, we usually think of Betsy Ross, George Washington crossing the Delaware, and Boston Tea Party. But this movie helped me to see the high cost of freedom, the cost of peace. The main character, played by Mel Gibson, didn't just talk about freedom. He earned it the hard way by sacrificing his home, his family, his safety. In a much greater way, Jesus didn't just talk about spiritual freedom, He alone fought the war against Satan. Jesus sacrificed everything for us. He bled and died on the battlefield of the cross. He made us right with God by giving us peace with God and forgiveness of all our sins. As we see Jesus standing with those disciples alive, remember that Jesus stands with us alive today. He is our conquering hero, our Savior, and our King – all because of God's Easter sequel that brings us peace.

What is Hollywood's motivation for giving us movie sequels? They will tell you they like to provide entertainment, but it's really about bringing boatloads of bucks for the cast, directors, and promoters. God's motivation is so much different. God's motivation for giving us His Easter sequel, is selfless and pure. God gives us reason to trust him for time and for eternity. He's earned it with Jesus as our only Savior from sin. Jesus gave us more than an Academy Award Performance. He gave us and every sinful believer salvation. Yes, **Thank God for His Easter Sequel.** Let's see how His sequel gives us faith.

Our reading continues: ***24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 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." Poor Thomas. You could say, Thomas was from the state of Missouri, the "show-me-state." He had to see proof with his own eyes. And who could blame him? He already saw the evidence with his own eyes: Jesus was dead on the cross. And so were Thomas' hopes, dreams, and faith. You could say, that Thomas walked out of the movie before it was even over. Thomas almost missed out. Don't make the same mistake. Don't ever walk out on Jesus and His love in your life! Jesus isn't done with you yet! And don't forget the rest of God's Easter sequel.

Our reading continues: ²⁶ **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!"** ²⁷ **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."** ²⁸ **Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"** How do you feel if you're Thomas right now? Whoops! Thomas sure got what he prayed for – another sequel. The following week, Jesus appeared again to Him and told Him: stop doubting and believe. This time, Thomas didn't miss the sequel. By God's grace, Thomas was given a gift: Jesus. And only by God's grace, Thomas accepted it.

Jesus said something interesting here to help us with our faith. He said: ²⁹ **Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."** This was a direct reference to us. None of us have ever seen Jesus in the flesh. We've never put our fingers where the nails were and reached out our hands and put them into His side. But, "we are blessed," Jesus says, because we still believe the vast evidence of the Holy Scriptures. And we'd do well to guard that gift of faith, given to us by the Spirit.

So the next time, you have a free Friday night, enjoy a good movie to God's glory, even if it is a sequel. But, more importantly, **Thank God for His Easter Sequel**, this second appearance of Jesus. His sequel gives a peace that's literally out of this world. And His sequel gives faith that lifts us from the despair of hell to the heights of heaven. And the only thing that anyone can say to that is: Amen.