

**Sermon Notes – April 27, 2025**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. John 20: 19-31**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“The Risen Christ ...Again and Again!”**

In today's reading, the risen Lord encounters fearful followers, whom the Holy Spirit empowers to bear witness.

The story from Acts is a climactic encounter between the apostles and religious leaders (after 4: 5-22), who lodge an accusation: “You are determined to bring this man's blood on us” (5: 28). Peter affirms, “You had [this Jesus] killed” (5: 30), reflecting an emphasis throughout Luke-Acts upon blaming “the Jews” for hostility against Jesus and His followers. Preachers should remember: legally, Rome killed Jesus; theologically, all humanity killed Jesus. In response to the leaders' silencing, Peter refuses: “We must obey God rather than any human authority” (5: 29). His bold witness reflects a power (the Spirit) outside himself, who empowers all followers of Jesus in their time of need (see Luke 12: 11-12).

The reading from Revelation introduces the letter as addressed to seven churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). The passage reads like a chiasm of creedal statements about God (1: 4, 8), Jesus (vv. 5, 7), and believers (v. 6). The “seven spirits” (v. 4) refers to angelic servants (compare 5: 6; 8: 2), charged with overseeing the churches (3: 1).

Today's gospel reading is more or less John's “Pentecost story,” which happens on Easter Sunday. Since Jesus extends peace twice (20: 19, 21), it is more than a mere greeting: it signifies a distinctive blessing for His followers (see also 14: 27; 16: 33). That the resurrected Jesus retains his scars suggests His crucifixion and death are integral to who He is - and always will be. The risen Jesus shares the Spirit (pneuma, “breath, wind”) by breathing upon followers (20: 22). In doing so, Jesus sends them out following the pattern of His own ministry (“As the Father sent me, so I send you,” v. 21) to extend forgiveness in Jesus' name.

Despite his reputation as “doubting,” Thomas's virtues are significant: realistic skepticism, a commitment to gathering and one of the strongest professions of faith in John's gospel (compare John 4: 29; 6: 68; 9: 38, 11: 27). The text does not say whether Thomas touched Jesus, only that Jesus offered. Although readers today appreciate the complexity of Thomas's character, Jesus' words encourage simple trust: Do not [be unbelieving (apistos)] but [believing (pistos)]” (20: 27). The closing blessing offered by Jesus directly addresses hearers and readers (v. 29).

A textual discrepancy in the final verse (v. 31) determines how we envision the intended audience of John's gospel: "may come to believe" (NRSV, aorist subjunctive) suggests new hearers, whereas the alternative "may continue to believe" (NRSVue, present subjunctive) suggests an audience of the already committed. Although both readings have ancient textual support, the latter makes more sense of the likely audience of John's gospel: a community of the ostracized, struggling with fear and doubt, in need of ongoing encouragement to their faith.