

## Sermon on John 20:19–31

I have fond memories of my childhood. I also have particularly fond memories of Easter. And I know that some of you children here today were just here last week, searching for Easter eggs in this very church. Maybe you remember the excitement—looking behind chairs, under tables, discovering little surprises hidden just for you.

When I was a child, days before Easter, I would go into the woods with my grandpa to look for moss for an Easter nest. The Easter bunny would then hide this nest with sweets in the garden. But it wasn't just sweets; I also remember getting a summer dress one year, and the Easter bunny even brought me my first bike. Yes, Easter is not a one-time event.

But the world is not always like that. It is not always full of joy and surprises. Sometimes everything feels heavy. Sometimes things fall apart. You worry about the future. And in moments like that, you just want to retreat, close the door behind you, and leave the world outside.

And that is exactly how our story begins today: with closed doors.

The disciples have locked themselves in—not out of comfort, but out of fear. Their rabbi and friend Jesus is dead. Crucified. Their hope is shattered. And although some are telling them about the resurrection—Mary Magdalene, Peter, John—they still cannot believe it. They are overwhelmed. What remains is fear.

And right into this closed world, Jesus comes. Into this house. Into this community. He stands among them and greets them with the words: “Peace be with you.”

Shalom.

Shalom is more than just a greeting. It is more than a wish for calm. In that word, Jesus speaks God's answer to their fear—and to the fear of the world.

Shalom is not just the absence of conflict. It is the presence of God's peace. It is reconciliation—with ourselves, with one another, and with God. Jesus does not say, “You have done everything right.” But he does say, “You are accepted.” That is the

Easter turning point: peace despite guilt, peace despite fear, peace in the midst of chaos.

And this is the peace the Church carries into the world—not as an idea, but as something we live. Every act of forgiveness, every open word, every outstretched hand becomes an echo of that Easter greeting: “Peace be with you.” Yes, Easter is not a one-time event.

These first words of the risen Christ are a key. He does not come to demand an account. He comes to bring peace. And he shows them his wounds. He shows them: it is really him. The Crucified One is the Risen One. Death does not have the last word.

And then something remarkable happens. Jesus breathes on them and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

These words remind us of the very beginning. In Genesis, we are told that God formed the human being from the dust of the ground and breathed into them the breath of life—the *ruach*. And the human became a living being.

And here, in this locked room, it happens again.

A new creation.

The disciples, frightened and powerless, are brought back to life. The Holy Spirit is the breath of God—the *ruach* that transforms people. Easter does not only mean new life for Jesus. It means new life for us. The Spirit turns fearful people into courageous witnesses. A closed room becomes an open movement.

The Spirit is not something abstract. It is God’s living presence within us. He gives courage where we hesitate, comfort where we grieve, clarity where we search, and strength where we are weak.

And Jesus does not send his disciples out empty-handed. He gives them what they need: his Spirit.

This also means for us: we do not have to live our faith in our own strength. The Spirit helps us—in prayer, in community, and in service. He is God's living nearness. Not only then, but also today.

But one person is missing: Thomas.

And when he later hears what has happened, he does not believe. Maybe he thinks, "I have hoped too much before and been disappointed." Or, "I need something I can hold on to." Thomas does not want to believe just because others say so. He wants to see. He wants to experience it for himself. He wants something real.

And many later called him "Doubting Thomas." But that is not quite fair. Because isn't it honest to have doubts? Isn't it better to say, "I cannot believe right now," than to pretend and remain empty inside?

Thomas stands for all those who want to believe—but cannot yet. For those who struggle. For those who ask questions. For those who say, "I want to understand."

And Jesus comes again.

Eight days later, through the same closed doors. This time Thomas is there. And Jesus turns to him—not with reproach, not with judgment, but with an invitation: "Put out your hand."

Come closer.

And Thomas recognizes him—more clearly than anyone else. "My Lord and my God."

The one who doubted speaks the strongest confession in the whole Gospel.

And then Jesus says a word that reaches all the way to us: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

That is not a rebuke. It is a promise. Because we are among those who have not seen—and yet we believe. Or at least, we try. With all our questions, all our doubts, all our struggles.

The story of Thomas shows us: doubt is not the opposite of faith. Often, it is the beginning of faith. Because he asks honestly. Because he wrestles. And those who seek honestly encounter Christ.

Faith is not a finished state. Faith is a movement. Sometimes steady, sometimes fragile. And Jesus meets us in all of it.

And Easter? Yes—Easter is not a one-time event.

So what does that mean for us today?

This story speaks right into our lives.

First: Jesus comes through closed doors—even today. He enters our fears, our uncertainties, our retreat. We do not have to open the way for him. He finds it himself. And he brings *shalom*—the peace of God.

Second: Jesus knows our doubts. And he does not condemn them. He takes them seriously. If your faith feels weak—come anyway. If you doubt—pray anyway. If you do not understand everything—stay on the path. Jesus meets us there.

Third: We are sent. As a church, as a community, as a people—with the Spirit of Christ, and with the calling to carry peace into the world. The gospel does not remain behind closed doors. It lives in open hearts and open hands.

Thomas says, “My Lord and my God.” Doubt becomes confession. Distance becomes closeness. The one who questioned becomes a believer.

And that is Easter: the Crucified One lives. And he comes to us—not when we are strong, but right in the middle of our weakness. And he says:

“Peace be with you.”

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.