**Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter-C**

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Aiken, South Carolina**

04-27-25

John 20:19–31

When God rescued his people out of Egypt, he gathered them to himself at Mt. Sinai, but they were not permitted to come near. They were not allowed to look upon the face of the Lord.

 God appeared to them atop Sinai, shrouded in clouds, thunder and lightning, and a booming voice. The whole effect caused the people to beg Moses to be their go-between, for they could not bear this fearsome presence. Moses himself trembled before God.

This is God as all mankind instinctively knows him. The God before whom we fall flat on our faces, and weep and mourn in abject fear, because we are acutely aware that we have no right to be in the presence of pure holiness; for we are unclean, unholy, sinful creatures. No one can see the face of God and live.

 But then, Jesus Christ, who is God in the flesh, having redeemed mankind from sin’s corruption, appears after his resurrection to the disciples.

 The difference in the interaction between God and man at Sinai, and God and man at Jesus’ resurrection, is the difference between God dealing with us through his holy law, and God dealing with us through his holy gospel.

Under the law, God’s rules for interacting with him were quite clear; don’t look; don’t touch; don’t even come near. Anyone who violated any of these three simple rules was struck dead on the spot.

 For example, we remember the incident when the ark of the covenant was being moved to Jerusalem, and a priest, whose name was Uzzah, fearing that it was about to fall off of the wagon, reached out and touched it. He was immediately stuck dead.

Fast forward to the evening of that first Easter Sunday; the disciples have locked themselves inside the house where they were staying, when suddenly, Jesus is standing right there, in the middle of them.

 The omnipresent God, that is, God who is present everywhere, manifests himself to them, up close and personal.

 This is no mere vision; Jesus is really, physically, present. Not in another form, but the same body, now glorified.

The same Jesus who was crucified, died and was buried is the same Jesus, now glorified, perfectly alive and well, standing among them.

In this, Jesus demonstrates that, without a doubt, he is alive, and that, without a doubt, he is God the Son, the second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Therefore, the disciples are in the presence of pure holiness; and yet, they are not struck dead. Rather, Jesus comes greeting them with peace, and they are overjoyed at his presence. Jesus even invites them to touch him as he shows them the glorified wounds from his crucifixion.

 What a difference from Sinai, where our separation from God due to our sin is emphasized, and Easter, where God demonstrates that the separation has been removed; that truly, it is finished.

 We who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Jesus Christ. In Him, God reckons you holy and righteous.

 In Jesus, you have been made clean; your sins are atoned for, and you are forgiven. As Jesus exhorted Thomas; do not be unbelieving, but believing, so he exhorts us who, as yet, have not seen him, to believe.

 The difference between Sinai and Sunday is that the promised redemption of mankind has now come to pass.

The only blood that atones for sin is the blood of Christ. No other sacrifice could redeem us, and no other sacrifice is needed.

 No longer to we need priests to stand between us and God. Just as Jesus breathed on his disciples the Holy Spirit, now, through baptism and his word, he gives you the Holy Spirit, and the authority, within the context of your particular vocations and life circumstances, to tell the world what God has done, and proclaim the forgiveness of sins in Christ’s name.

Now, everyone who repents and believes in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior is a member of a royal priesthood, offering to God the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

 Your prayers for yourself, for others, and for the world around you, are a sweet incense rising up to the Lord, who gladly hears and answers every petition.

All of these wonderful blessings have been given to all mankind, and are received by all who believe.

Because Jesus Christ has completed his work of redemption, God, who was once far off because of mankind’s sin, now dwells among us, and in all who believe the gospel. He calls us to be and remain in him. As we live out our lives and pursue our many vocations, he uses us to draw others to his saving word as well. May the Lord help us to be his witnesses. Amen.