John 20:31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

I will tell you that when I first looked at this text, on Monday evening, and I chose what it was I wanted to preach on, that my thoughts and ideas became a bit different as I now sit to write this sermon. I am writing this sermon on Wednesday afternoon as I sit at Covenant Harrison in the surgery waiting room. That’s because at this time Raetta is up in pre-op and will be undergoing her surgery today.

The text that I want to preach on is still the same, but the words of introduction will be a bit different. As I re-read this text and worked through it in my mind the words that especially stood out is what Jesus said as he appeared to his disciples. Simple words. Actually words that most consider to be the standard greeting of the day for the people of Jesus’ day, but words that are standing out for me at the moment. They are wonderful words and what these words are saying to me on this day I pray and hope that all of you hear and know. Yep, I am talking about those opening words of Jesus, **“Peace be with you!”**

There is a comfort in reading those words at this time. The resurrected Jesus proclaims them and I believe he means them in a deeper way than just greeting his disciples. I believe he speaks the wonder and marvel of what he is for us today and every day. Jesus has come and has proclaimed the heart and core of what he is about. If I may, I will count these words that very first sermon that Jesus preached to his gathered disciples, a sermon they needed to hear and contemplate. Jesus was telling us the marvel of his work. He has and continues to bring peace to our lives.

What an awesome thing that is. Jesus has brought us peace. Peace because he has risen from death and has won the victory over sin, death and the devil. Peace because whatever it is that troubles us or weighs upon us is now nothing because of Jesus. Peace because he is the King of kings and Lord of Lords and has proven that all things in heaven and earth are in his hands. Peace because God and man are reconciled and we no longer have to stew and bake, grope and grovel for any kind of hope and comfort. Peace because love has won the victory and that love is what Jesus is about.

So on this day, with my wife in surgery and a long couple of months still ahead of us, I am not a basket case, not stressed and strained or all a flutter with worry. I am at peace. Peace because my Savior is with me. Peace because everything is in his hands and I know that there is nothing to worry about. But I want you to understand this clearly. God’s peace is total and complete. Now, I have my idea of what I want out of this day and how I want things to come out but I am willing and more than able to grasp that no matter what happens, no matter what the outcome or the news I might get in a few hours or so, that peace of God is and will be with me. It is all in God’s hands. Jesus victory and his first sermon tell us that. He brings us peace. He declares his peace. He is God and Lord and He promises to be with me and all who believe in Him. He promises to never give us more than we can bear, that he will make all things work out for our good and salvation and that He is always with us. I, actually, Raetta and Kayla and I, have God’s gracious peace in our lives. We believe his promises, trust his victory and know that without any doubt the message of Easter, the message of the resurrection and God’s Word is really all that we need. God is our peace, our strength, hope, joy and confidence in everything.

So let storms rage or floods come. Let mountains fall or the earth quake. Let the enemy kill and the thief steal. World and devil, throw what you may our way and we will simply and wonderfully take shelter in the peace that is Jesus. Please, dear children of God, do not overlook or underestimate this wonderful little sermon of Jesus to his disciples as he first met with them as a group and began to help them grasp the peace that he truly came to bring.

Let’s then continue to grasp this wonder of Jesus and turn our attention to the words of our text under this theme: **BELIEVE AND HAVE LIFE.**

Now I chose these words to preach on because I figured on the basis of these words I could highlight just about everything this text had to reveal to us. And what is revealed is considerable. In this text covers the night of the resurrection, the next Sunday night of resurrection and then points to the whole reason for Jesus. Pretty extensive stuff for just a few verses. But stuff so important to grasp and understand.

First, note that this history and really all the history of Jesus is written for a specific purpose. No, it is not written so we could have power and conquest. It is not written that we might control and you in your life. It is written that we might believe. Believe what? **Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.** There is the purpose of God’s Word. From beginning to end. To believe. To believe in Jesus!

Why? Well, what is recorded for us on this day? We have the record of two of the appearances of Jesus, the risen Jesus to his disciples. Mind you, they last knew he was dead. They knew he had been speared, prepped and buried. But they had also heard things. For instance, on that first night when Jesus shows up we are told they were gathered because Jesus had appeared to Peter, to the women and to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. At this point, everyone is gathered to talk of this stuff. But note they are gathered behind locked doors because they are afraid. So they know something has happened but they are not quite sure what. Not sure until Jesus now shows up.

Yep, in that locked room and then there stands Jesus. He was just there! He speaks peace to them. He shows them his hands and feet because the wounds are still there but have no effect upon Jesus. He is there to let them know one thing and one thing beyond doubt….He lives. He who was dead is now alive and because of that and that alone the disciples can be filled with His peace and wonder!

Now I could say something at this point about the fact that Jesus breathes on his disciples and gives them a special gift of the Holy Spirit. But that is going to have to wait for another sermon. I will tell you that he does bestow on them and all believers a wonderful gift that first night. A gift he will repeatable give in the next 40 days. That is the gift to either share his peace or to withhold his peace. I’ll bet you didn’t think of it in that way. Jesus gives to believers this gift: **“Whenever you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”** The disciples are not the ones regulating this gift, it is Jesus. As long as a person is repentant, God will and does forgive them. When a person is not repentant God will not and does not forgive them. It is all based on God’s Word, God’s Word with its foundation, power and marvel absolutely wrapped up in Jesus. And just so you get this all the more, please remember that in God’s world it is not a matter of people who are good or evil, who are holy or unholy. In God’s world every human is a sinner who needs the Christ. The measurement of God is whether we are repentant or unrepentant, believing or nonbelieving. It is God’s measurement that counts and never, ever man’s. Man just gets the privilege of sharing with each other this peace or the lack thereof. Got that?

By the way, it is clear that the disciples who were present on that first night now know that Jesus is alive and is the Son of God. Everything that Jesus had taught them and shared with them is true and trustworthy. You can see that if you just pay attention to what they tell Thomas who was not there. They said, **“We have seen the Lord!”** I can tell you for the next week or so they spoke many other words, shared with Thomas many other things about that night in order to help him to believe, but Thomas would not have it. Thomas didn’t want to have faith, Thomas wanted proof.

That exactly what Thomas got the next week. Honestly, I think Jesus was too easy on him. Yet such is Jesus. Peaceful, calm, encouraging and patient. He shows Thomas his hands and feet and invites him to stick his finger in there. But Thomas knows when his is beaten and he exclaims what all of us should say, **“My Lord and my God!”** Thomas now knows the truth. Jesus is alive. Jesus who was dead is now alive and because of that and that alone we can be filled with his peace and wonder.

Let’s just take a moment to hear and take in the words Jesus responds to Thomas with, but really those words are directed to every person who wavers or “just doesn’t know.” Jesus said, **“Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** That’s faith. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith this way: **“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”** I have never seen the resurrected Jesus. I have never seen God or heaven or even any visible or tangible proof of the existence and reality of God. Yet I believe. I believe because God has given me faith, given it through his Holy Spirit. That’s why the spirit is sent. That’s why those disciples believed on the first night because they got, directly from Jesus that gift of the Holy Spirit. You believe because of the Holy Spirit. You believe because the Holy Spirit has given you faith, given you the ability to see and grasp the wonder and truth of God. You are a child of God because of this work of the Holy Spirit. And just so you get it all the more, please note that the Holy Spirit works in us through the gospel in word and sacrament. In other words through the Word of Jesus. Because the point of Jesus is to believe and have life.

Life! Not just that you are breathing or walking and talking. Life, in the sense that you know and grasp your worth in God. You know your purpose and destiny. Your purpose is faith and your destiny is eternal life with God in Jesus. Let me share with you a number of passages that help to proclaim this truth of Jesus and his gift of life.

To grab that we mean more than just this worldly “life,” here is Jesus speaking to us in Luke 12:22-23 **“Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. 23 Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.”** Do not measure your life by the things of this world. Then we hear Jesus again in John 8:12 **“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."** Again we grasp that life is much more than the measure of what happens in this world. It is something of and from Jesus. Then we turn to that most famous passage of Jesus to comprehend this gift of life. John 11:25-26 Jesus **said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."**

What did the disciples understand of this life? Paul in Romans says, 6:22 **“But now that you have been set free from sin…the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.”** And just one more passage from 1 Timothy, words all of us could claim. 1:16 says, **“But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.”**

Here is God’s gift to us in Jesus. It is life, eternal life and salvation. No matter what goes on in this world, it is nothing compared to the gift and joy of eternal life. That eternal life is found in Jesus. And if you grasp this eternal life in Jesus then you do understand his peace, the peace we started this sermon off with. The peace Jesus gives and proclaims that is all wrapped up in his victory and the fact that He lives.

So believe and have life. May this message of peace be yours. May this wonder of Jesus and the gift of eternal life be your confidence and hope. May the words recorded in Scripture be the entire basis for this peace and hope for all of these things are wrapped up in the victory and joy, the peace that Jesus came to give us. Peace be with you. Amen.