

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

Over the past months, there has been a heated debate in our country over the use of firearms and how strict our government should or shouldn't be in regulating who can own guns and what kind of guns they can and can't have. Now, I'm not here today to give you my opinion or to try to sway you to one side of the fence or the other.

But all this talk surrounding firearms got me thinking about how guns have been used throughout history, particularly around the time when the west was still wild. Any of you who have seen old western films or are fans of John Wayne can probably imagine the scene. The two men, usually the sheriff and the bad guy, standing yards apart, facing each other, eyes lasered in on their target, their palms sweaty, their fingers twitching, waiting for the magic word, "DRAW!"

And what firearm would they whip out? The good ol' six-shooter, a Colt .45 single action. Do you know what one of the Colt's nicknames is? The "Peacemaker." A fitting nickname for that gun because it would do exactly that. When the sheriff would win the duel, there would be peace. Peace. That's what you and I want. It's what we crave. And as believers, we have our own 'Peacemaker,' one much less violent than the Colt .45. He gives us true and lasting peace. OUR RISEN LORD REVEALS HIMSELF AS OUR PEACE! He shows us the evidence to believe it. He sends us to share it with the world.

You know, I would have given anything to have been a fly on the wall of the room where the disciples met Easter night. With everything that took place throughout the day, there must have been quite the commotion among the disciples. It all started with a violent earthquake and an empty tomb. The women who went to give Jesus' body a proper burial never got the chance. The angel gave them the good news that Jesus had risen. Then Mary Magdalene saw and spoke to Jesus herself. And then, two disciples met the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus, and at their return to Jerusalem, they heard more good news. Jesus had also appeared to Peter. I'm sure everyone was wondering when the next Jesus sighting would happen. And more importantly, who would be the next to see Jesus? There was definitely excitement in the air.

Yet, a bit of fear lingered. They locked all the doors out of fear of the Jews. But what did they have to fear? Well, they knew about the empty grave, but odds are that same news had also reached the Jewish leaders. And they would never believe that Jesus had actually risen from the dead. The only logical explanation could be that his disciples had stolen the body so they could claim that Jesus rose. The disciples were afraid of being accused of and arrested for taking Jesus' body.

But the locked doors were no match for the risen Savior. He stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" What an amazing greeting! Even though these words were the common Hebrew greeting, they carried new meaning. Jesus came in peace. The disciples thought he was a ghost coming to haunt them. But Jesus had no intentions to hurt them. But even more importantly, Jesus came bringing them true peace, the peace of forgiveness. The war with sin was over. Jesus had won, and he rose to show it.

But if his greeting wasn't enough to calm their fears, Jesus had more evidence. He held up his hands, showed them the holes made by the nails. He pointed to his side, where the centurion's spear had

sliced through his flesh. Jesus invited the disciples to touch those marks, feel Jesus' flesh and bones for themselves. Luke also adds that Jesus asked them for some fish and ate it to show he wasn't a ghost. And with such overwhelming evidence, the disciples believed. They were overjoyed.

"Seeing is believing." This expression conveys the idea what we often need to see concrete evidence before we believe. Like if you've ever gotten a letter in the mail, maybe from Publisher's Clearing House, saying you've won a million dollars. What's your first reaction? "This is too good to be true. I'll believe it when I see it." But if someone actually came to your front door holding a check for a million dollars, you'd probably be a bit more believing.

"This is too good to be true." That's what Jesus' disciples must have first thought when they saw him. But after they saw the evidence, they believed. They believed because they saw.

Seeing is believing. In the second half of our gospel reading, another disciple needed to see before believing, Thomas. He wasn't there in the room, and he wouldn't believe until he touched Jesus himself. He's the originator for the term "doubting Thomas." But really, all the disciples were 'doubting Thomases,' needing physical proof before believing.

You and I can be doubting Thomases as well. Many times we so readily question God and his promises. God says the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. "Well, why does he let my family suffer financially, even when I pray every day that he would help me find a job?" He promises he will always be with us. "Where was God when my brother died in a freak car accident?" "If Jesus were really with me, then he would definitely keep me from ever sinning."

Every one of us has doubted God at some point in our lives. As sinners, we want to have visible proof God is really present in our lives. And when we don't see that evidence, we put God off to the side. We leave him behind. We sinfully look to ourselves instead, as if God never existed. Then, we are no different from unbelievers who have rejected God their entire lives. We don't have peace with God.

But our proof is in the empty tomb. Every time we doubt, God lovingly points us back to the empty tomb. Jesus didn't rise from the dead just so he could prove all the nay-sayers wrong. Jesus' resurrection was the finishing touch on his work of salvation. His work began at his birth. Jesus lived his entire life without sinning, not even once. Even his worst enemies never found him guilty of sin. Even though he was perfect, Jesus allowed himself to be falsely accused and convicted of death, a horrible death on the cross. But he did that so he could bring us peace. On the cross, Jesus took all our sins and suffered God's punishment for them. In return, he gave us true peace, the forgiveness of sins.

Then came his glorious resurrection. The depths of hell could not hang onto Jesus. The tomb could not contain him. Easter morning, Jesus burst forth from the grave, victorious over sin, death, and the devil. The victorious Lord appeared to his disciples as the true Peacemaker.

Now, we may not be able to physically see Jesus, as his disciples did that Easter night. But God does show us Jesus through his Word. In God's Word we find that true peace Jesus won for us on the cross. For every time we've doubted or questioned God, he assures us of the peace of the forgiveness of sins.

For every time we do give in to sin, Jesus forgives that sin so we can have peace with God. And because we have peace with God now, the empty tomb guarantees us we will have eternal peace with God in heaven.

What a comforting message of peace we have because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection! Our risen Savior has brought us true peace, peace that has reconciled us with God. Jesus has given us the evidence of peace to believe. Now, he wants us to share it. Our Risen Savior Sends Us To Share True Peace With The World!

In the locked room, when the disciples finally realized who was standing before them, Jesus repeated his greeting, "Peace be with you!" He was reassuring them of the true peace they now because of his life, death, and resurrection. But he didn't want them to keep that peace to themselves. God had sent Jesus to earth to bring peace to all people. Now Jesus was sending the disciples to share the message of that peace, the wonderful news of the gospel, with all people. And what would the heart of their message be? It would be the forgiveness Jesus has obtained by his death on the cross. It was peace between God and men through Jesus' work.

Jesus was giving them a huge task, but he wouldn't send them out unprepared. He gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit. He sent the Holy Spirit into their hearts to strengthen them. With the Holy Spirit, the disciples now had the power and the authority to proclaim peace by forgiving the sins of others.

This wasn't the only time the disciples would receive the Holy Spirit. 50 days later, the Holy Spirit once again filled the disciples. Remember what day that was? Pentecost. Jesus was really anticipating Pentecost, when the disciples would fully receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And on Pentecost, they did. On that day, thousands of Jews had gathered in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit came in a loud wind. As the Holy Spirit entered the disciples, tongues of fire appeared on their heads. And filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter confidently preached the gospel to all the Jews who were gathered. What was the result of his preaching? The people repented of their sins and asked for forgiveness. Peter and the other disciples gave the people the peace of forgiveness by baptizing over 3000 that day.

The disciples were able to preach so boldly and confidently on Pentecost because of the Holy Spirit. But Pentecost wasn't the only time Jesus' disciples would need the Holy Spirit to speak boldly. Jesus knew when he was giving them the Holy Spirit what obstacles and dangers they would face in their preaching. Many disciples would face rejection, persecution, prison, and even death because of their preaching.

But the job of spreading the gospel wasn't only the disciples'. Jesus has also sent us out with the commission to share the message of true peace with the world. He wants us to boldly tell others about the peace he brings. But he so often sees us doing the opposite. How eager are you to talk to your friends about Jesus? When you hear a friend cursing, do you tell him it's wrong, or do you join in with the crowd? When the right opportunity arises to comfort someone suffering with the sweet message of God's Word, do you snatch it up? Or do you pass it by, leaving it for someone else to do?

Sometimes we may not have the most popular message, but Jesus still wants us to share it. He wants us to share it because it's the greatest message, a message of peace through Jesus. When we fail to carry

out our mission, this message gives comfort to us. The message of peace gives us assurance that our sins are forgiven. We know our sins are forgiven because of the cross and the empty tomb. The cross reminds us Jesus died to pay for every sin of all time. The empty tomb is God's guarantee that our salvation is complete.

Just as Jesus equipped his disciples to go out by giving them the Holy Spirit, he does the same for us. Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit when he brought us to faith. The Holy Spirit strengthens us whenever we come into contact with God's Word. God gives us encouragement and confidence whenever we join with other believers to worship him. Jesus prepares us to go out and share his peace when we read and study his Word in Bible classes and in our own personal lives.

Jesus has given us everything we need for our mission, and he wants us to faithfully use them. With his help, we can boldly share the gospel with others. And that doesn't mean we have to hop in the car and travel around the country or go to a foreign country to share God's Word. You could probably think of people around you who need to hear the gospel, friends, family, co-workers. Having the peace Jesus brings, we gladly share it so other might have the same peace we have in Jesus.

Do you find it a little odd that the Colt .45, a gun, is called the "Peacemaker"? I find it ironic that a weapon which kills, that brings death, is seen as something that makes peace. Thankfully, the same can't be said about our Peacemaker, Jesus. Our risen Lord brings us true peace, the peace of the forgiveness of sins. He's shown us the evidence to believe it. He sends us to share it with others. This peace assures us we won't die. This is the peace that promises us we will LIVE forever in heaven. Amen.