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Grace mercy and peace to all of you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

When Jesus appears he drives away fears. When Jesus appears on the scene, whenever he appears to you, your fears are going to be driven away. This is a fact. That's the power of Jesus. How tough is Jesus? I will always be drawn to this Sunday's reading because it just shows Jesus in his toughest state. He appears on the scene and says, "Hey, stick your fingers into my scars. Go ahead, guys, look at the scars. Look at my side. He is tough."

We've got all these action movies, these tough heroes. You remember the whole series Die Hard with Bruce Willis. The whole concept of that series is he's so tough he never dies. Well, Jesus is the real living thing. He has died already and risen. He is never going to die again. He doesn't die hard, he lives hard! Now, currently, He is risen and living for all eternity. How tough is Jesus?

The minute He gets there--here's the disciples (I'm going to talk about this later), grown men, right? These are supposed to be the guys that are not scared. These are supposed to be the protectors. Here they are, grown men, scared, locking the doors. "Are the doors locked, guys?" And here comes Jesus and the minute he appears they're glad! They rejoice! All the fears are gone. That's how powerful Jesus is! That's how tough Jesus is. In 1 John 4:18 it says perfect love drives out fear. It talks about fear having to do with punishment but perfect love drives out fear. Now we know in that same chapter it says God is love. So I'm trying to put this all together for you. Jesus is perfect love then because He's the Son of God. Jesus drives out fear! This is a fact. It is the truth. Whatever you're afraid of—when Jesus appears he drives away our fears.

So then let's get into this night, Easter night. The disciples have gotten reports that Jesus has been seen by the women and by Peter but he hasn't appeared to everybody. They are scared and they've locked the doors of the house. So what I want to ask you to think about...what all are they scared of? There's the obvious things. They're scared that they are going to die. Because if they killed Jesus—if the chief priests and the Sanhedrin killed Jesus—maybe they'll come for his followers next. So there's that very real fear that they could die. There might also be, in with that, a fear of pain. You know any of us, if we think we might be about to undergo a lot of a pain.... You know they were pretty brutal on Jesus. What if they persecute the disciples this way? So maybe there's a fear of just physical pain.

But I don't think that is all, by any stretch. I think there's a lot of other things going on that they're afraid of on that night. So let me give you a few of them. I think one...I think they're afraid of the public embarrassment and shame. They've followed Jesus for three years saying this is the guy, this is the Messiah. Now that Messiah has died on a cross. And yes, there's reports that He's risen. But they don't know what to make of it. So they're scared that they're going to look like idiots. I don't know how else to say it in a more polite way. They are scared they're going to look like fools. That everybody's going to say, "Oh, where's your Messiah now? You guys thought you were so important and you were following the Messiah. Well, where is he now?" So there's that real shame of being wrong.

And then add to all that—what if He really is alive? Now we've got a whole other thing to be scared of. What's God going to say to us when we deny—like Peter three different times denied even knowing Him? What is God going to do to us? So they've got all these fears.

Now I thought about this a lot this last week, trying to think of a way that I could summarize all these fears under one umbrella. And I think this is a good way to do it. If you take all the things they're scared of and put them under one thing—they are scared of not being good enough. They're scared of not being good enough for the Jews because they were wrong about Jesus. They're scared of not being good enough to suffer and die if they have to die like Jesus did. And they're scared of not being good enough for God when Jesus comes to address why they denied him and all left him.

Now that's what happens—take note—if you are going to be the hero of your story. This is what happens. You're always going to be scared that you're not good enough. This is inevitable if you are going to be the hero of your own life and your own story. Get ready to be frightened cuz you're always going to be scared. You're not going to be enough.

These are our fears today. Yes, we have the big fears. I don't want to discount those. We do have the fears of dying. We have the fears of pain. Those are very real. But you probably don't think about those every day. Unless you're very sick. Our day-to-day fears are more like this--we're afraid of not being liked. We're afraid of people thinking that we're not good enough, that we're not worth their time, or that we're idiots. Or that we're fools or we're not smart enough or we don't know as many things as other people do. That's what scares us. We are scared like the disciples of not being good enough for other people. We're scared of our reputations being hurt. We're scared of not being in the know enough. Other people you know keep up with everything and maybe we don't...so we we're scared of not keeping up enough.

We're scared of people not thinking we're good at what we do. Look at the disciples. They're supposed to be good at this! They're scared that they stink at what they're supposed to be good at. Well, we've got the same fears. We're scared that somebody's going to tell us that we're not good at our job. That we're not good at being a mom or we're not good at being a dad. "How could your kids turn out like that?" We're terrified of it. We're terrified of somebody telling us we're not a good friend. "How come you didn't write? How come you didn't call? How come you didn't talk to me?" We're terrified of not being good enough for God, not being a good Christian. We don't do as much as other people do. We're not as bold at telling other people about Jesus. We're scared of not being good enough.

Now what happens then when Jesus appears? Here's the disciples scared they're not good enough for anybody. They have totally blown it. When Jesus shows up! When Jesus appears! He drives away all their fears. I can't impress upon you enough. If you can please just imagine this scene. Men in their 20s and 30s. Most likely grown men. Some of them with their own families. Locking themselves in a room terrified. Dads and husbands are supposed to be the guys that are not scared! They guys are locking the doors. They're terrified and here comes Jesus to these grown men and it's like you can just feel this huge sigh of relief. "Oh, everything we were scared of! It's doesn't matter now, does it? Because here's Jesus!" That's how tough Jesus is. He is the hero of the story! When he comes on the scene it's like you can say, "Oh, now I don't have to be the hero anymore. I don't have to worry about being good enough cuz he's good enough! He will take care of everything where I'm not good enough."

I mean, look now. Let me take a few minutes and impress upon you the toughness of Jesus. One, he doesn't need the doors to be unlocked. He doesn't knock on the door and say, "Hey, um, guys, it's me. Could you let me in?" No, this is Jesus! This is the Son of God risen from the dead. Doors are nothing for him. This is Jesus in his glorified, resurrected body which, by the way, you will have too when you rise from the dead. Doors don't mean anything to him anymore. He simply appears where he wants to appear in the flesh. And then Luke tells us (John doesn't mention this but Luke does) some of them think he's a ghost so Luke tells us that they give Him something to eat. "I'll show you I'm flesh and blood, right? But I'm flesh and blood in a whole new way that you've never even imagined." So Bruce Willis has got nothing on Jesus. Jesus will never die. Period. Ever. And so He appears. And by the way, that's how tough He is that He can appear to you every time you call on Him and need Him. And how He can appear in Bread and Wine in the Lord's Supper. That's how tough He is. His glorified body. So there's that.

Number two. Look how tough He is. He gives peace. When you and I do this we say something like this, "I hope it goes well. I hope things go okay. I'll pray for you. I wish you the best." That's all our kind of language. Jesus' language is, "Here's peace! I give it to you." He is peace in the flesh. He just gives it. Then thirdly He says, "Look at my scars for a minute. Let me use the action movies again. In any kind of action movie the hero always has scars. Like battle wounds from the past. Well, Jesus has the ultimate battle wounds. He says, "Look in my scars, guys. Look at where the nails were in my hands and my feet. Look at the spear mark in my side. I died and I'm alive." That shows His toughness.

Four, He breathes the spirit. He breathes fire! When He breathes, He gives the Spirit. So this is like taking us back to Creation when God created Adam and then it said He breathed into Adam the breath of life. That is powerful breath! Not in the bad way like you and I sometimes have. He breathes fire in the good way. He breathed the spirit on them. That's how tough He is.

And now, and now you thought I was winding down, but I'm not. I'm winding up. Now He gives the biggest, toughest gift that only Jesus risen from the dead can give. He says, "Guys, I'm sending you out with something powerful. With the forgiveness of sins!" That's only something a true hero can do is forgive the very people that made him die on the cross. That's how tough Jesus is. He doesn't have to get revenge. He doesn't have to come back, "Now it's time for me to give you guys what you deserve!" He comes back and says, "Now I'm ready to forgive you all your sins." You want to talk about fears disappearing! You don't have to be good enough! He knows you're not good enough! And He comes with the ultimate gift—forgiveness for all the ways you're not good enough. He comes to make you holy in His blood.

Now we call this in the church—we have a name for it because it's so important—we call it the Office of the Keys. In Matthew 16 He talked about this even before His death and He said, "I will give you the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven." Now we know what a key is. It unlocks a door. Now just look at the odd connection here. The doors are locked because the disciples are so scared. Jesus says, "I'm going to give you a key to unlock doors so that people will not have to be afraid anymore." See the connection? So we in the church, as the body of Christ, have been given this key to open the door to Jesus. When Jesus appears, He drives away fears. And we have the key to open the door to Him. The key of forgiveness.

Now you're used to thinking about that only in terms of pastors. Because the pastor is the one that publicly exercises the office of the keys. So, you know, you go to church and we do the confession and the pastor says, "I forgive you all your sins in the stead of Christ." That's how you're used to it. But that's only one part of the office of the keys. The other side of the office of the keys is every one of you as Christians, part of the body of Christ, forgiving one another. You are exercising the office of the keys. You are opening the door to Heaven whenever you forgive somebody's sins.

So I'm going to give you the simplest, quickest example of this. A husband goes to his wife. He really screwed up. He really hurt her and he says, "I am so sorry. I never should have done that. Please forgive me." She, the wife, has the key to open to him the door to Jesus. All she has to say is "I forgive you" and the doors are burst open and Jesus is there to drive away all fears.

Sadly, do you know how often we miss that opportunity? Somebody is hurting and they know they've screwed up. They know they've done something wrong. They're desperate for somebody to tell them an answer to the fact that they're not good enough. They're so scared they have not been good enough. And we have the key to open the door to Jesus. All it is, "I forgive you. Jesus forgives you. He loves you. He died on the cross for your sins." And you, as the church, as Christ's body, are sent out with that power and that toughness.

In Luke 24 Jesus specifically says, "Guys, I am sending you out to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins. That's what it's all about. Go with the gift of forgiveness." So whenever you or anybody you know is scared because you're not good enough—you have the key straight from Jesus. You know that when He appears, He drives away fears. Open the door to Christ. Say a prayer. Come to church. Come to the Divine Service. Open the Scriptures. Open the door to Jesus and He will truly drive away all that you're scared of.

Now the peace of God—the peace that He gave to His disciples, you understand—the peace that passes all understanding; that peace of God guard your hearts and your minds and drive away all your fears in Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.