

*19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."*

*26A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." 30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

We were gathered around the table in the third floor rehabilitation unit of Lutheran Medical Center. This was the monthly meeting of the LAOS Board - Lutheran Agencies Organized in Service. Our goals are to increase giving by congregations to support the work of Lutheran Chaplaincy Service, Lutheran Children's Aid and Family services, Lutheran Housing, Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry, Lutheran Urban Community Ministry, and the support of the Chaplain for Lutheran Medical's Hospice Program. When I started on this board the agencies I just mentioned meant no more to me than they mean to most of you. But over the past few years I have learned of the commitment to helping and healing these agencies share, and of the dedication of those employed by the agencies. I am one of the few at large members of the board, the rest are directly connected to one of the agencies. Each meeting those who are agency related bring their hopes and dreams, their accomplishments and disappointments and share them with the rest of us.

Thursday night as I looked around the table I saw something I usually do not see there. I saw people who looked very weary. Exhausted, discouraged. I heard reports about changing government support for programs, about people no longer being eligible, about help no longer being offered. In the newspapers all of this is only numbers. In the eyes I those on the board,

these changes mean less food for the children who eat at the hunger centers, less money for summer camp for the inner city youth, the possible closing of the after school drop in center that many of our confirmation students toured last fall.

Still what I saw in their eyes as I looked around the table was more than this. I think also I was seeing the reflection of what they had heard and seen and read from Oklahoma City - sudden violence, deep sorrow and loss - the certainty that the people whose lives were shattered there last week are no different from you and me.

They were gathered in a room. The doors were locked for they were afraid. They had learned so close at hand that no one is safe. Jesus who healed the sick, who forgave sins, who put himself between sinners and those who would condemn them, Jesus had been arrested and whipped, mocked and crucified. He had had the courage to walk where God was leading - the powers of this world could not tolerate that.

The disciples locked the doors.

Fear.

How many terrorists' bombs will explode before we will start hiding? Will we build walls around our neighborhoods - flee the cities - no longer go where crowds gather, even to church? .

In that prison of fear Jesus suddenly appeared. Peace be with you was his word to them. Then he showed them his hands, his side. No, the cross was not a myth, a bad dream, even when its death had been defeated its marks remained. Lives can be rebuilt and buildings too, but the folks in Oklahoma City will never be unscarred again.

Nor we.

"Peace be with you," said Jesus. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Their future would not be defeat and fear, running, hiding behind locked doors. God's war with every enemy of God was continuing in them. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Jesus breathed on them. "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any they are retained."

Sent and empowered and guided by Father, Son and Holy Spirit they would open the doors and go out. Those with the power to kill would not own this world, but the one with the

power to raise the dead. God's people would not be a running, hiding, fearful flock, but would go from that room into the world to continue Jesus work of life and healing and forgiving.

Today just when we are being tempted to lock the doors Jesus speaks, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Not just me and some folks who gather down at Lutheran Medical Center once a month, but you. Just when we are being tempted to lock up all our assets in our personal rainy day accounts, Jesus reminds us, "As you did it for one of the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you did it for me."

What happened to those disciples who left the locked room? Most of them were put on their own crosses sooner or later. But not before more disciples were made and widows fed and Christ proclaimed. The enemies of God have continued the attack even to this day, but we know that our greatest enemy is not death, but fear. Christ has conquered death. But when fear owns our days and our deeds, then God's spirit in us is chained.

A bomb explodes, a cross is raised, fear is great, faith is weak. But Jesus breathes his own spirit into you, his power, his life, his victory are in you. The dead will be raised, the hungry will be satisfied, the fearful will be filled with faith.

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

"Receive the Holy Spirit." Amen.