Jesus Erases and Replaces

In 1770 the magical erasing power of rubber was accidentally discovered by English engineer Edward Nairne. Before this, the preferred substance for erasing graphite or charcoal from a piece of paper was a soft, crustless piece of bread. As you can probably imagine, these bread-based erasers, despite being very effective, had plenty of drawbacks. But when Edward Nairne reached for his edible eraser that day, he mistakenly grabbed a piece of rubber and was surprised when his pencil marks vanished from the page. It wasn't until 1839 however that American inventor Charles Goodyear discovered a process of heating natural rubber to strengthen its durability and make the iconic pink eraser block. And it wasn't until 20 years later that another inventor, decided to try attaching an eraser to the back end of a pencil. This simple invention gave us the wonderful tool we have today that has the ability both to erase and with a simple flip of the fingers to replace that mistake with its proper correction.

In the gospel for today we get to see Jesus erase our mistakes, more specifically first our fears and then our doubts, and because of his resurrection and through his Word he replaces them with his peace and with proof.

Our portion of God's Word today starts in the evening of the first Easter Sunday, and the disciples were gathered in a much different setting than what I imagine your Easter get-togethers might look like. The disciples gathered behind locked doors that evening, not because that's the routine thing to do to keep out potential unwanted guests and keep your house and possessions safe, no we are told it was for a specific reason that their doors were locked. It was out of fear for the Jewish leaders. Fear of what might happen to them since they were known followers of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. The Jewish leaders went to great lengths to get Jesus executed, who is to say they wouldn't do the same for his disciples.

And what if Jesus would appear to them? That fear of the Jewish leaders might quickly become a concoction of additional fears they were not ready to face. For most of them the last time they were with Jesus, they abandoned him, fleeing from those Judas brought to arrest Jesus. This came shortly after they promised Jesus they were willing to die for him, surely the first words out of the mouth of the resurrected Jesus to his cowering disciples would be rebuking them for the way they abandoned him, for the way Peter denied him, for their fear hiding behind locked doors because of their association with him. How quickly they had forgotten and abandoned all the things Jesus had told them before his death. How quickly had they lost their confidence in their Savior and placed their fear of retaliation from the world over his promises. There certainly was no shortage of fear in that room.

Do we not find ourselves hiding in our own locked rooms out of fear of our association with Jesus, out of fear of the retaliation of the world against our God? A fear, that selfishly puts us first and that blinds us from the truths of God's Word. We are too scared of rejection and what might be said or thought of us as if what is more important than the sharing of the message of salvation is how the listener is going to view us. The last time you had the opportunity to share your faith, did you rather avoid bringing up religion or perhaps gave a shallow answer and steered the conversation to something less personal, or denied or withheld the fact that you are a believer in Jesus all together. When we take a second to stop and think about it, our fears closely resemble the fears of the disciples locked in that room on the first Easter evening. If Jesus were to appear to me right now, what would be the first words out of his mouth?

And then Jesus appeared... we see the first words out of our resurrected Lord's mouth to his disciples are, "peace be with you." The complete opposite of the harsh rebuke that they and we deserve. Jesus pronounces his

peace upon his fearful disciples. And just like that, their fear is erased. There is no more mention of fear in the rest of the section. Jesus twice says to his disciple peace be with you in the first 3 verses. This is much more than just a polite greeting by Jesus, his words are power, and so his peace is power, powerful enough to erase the fears of the disciples. Jesus does not just erase their fears and leave nothing in its place. As easy and as quickly as a flip of the fingers he replaces it with peace which we are told results in the disciples becoming overjoyed. Jesus proclaims this same powerful and performative peace to us which results in joy and erases all our fears.

But how is Jesus able to provide this peace to his disciples and to us? The answer to that is found in what happened on that Sunday and on the Friday prior. This peace is given by someone who has just conquered death. He died on the cross and defeated sin, death and the devil. And now Christ is risen, the tomb is empty, death could no longer hold him. And death can no longer hold you. Jesus went to that cross for you, for your fears for your mistakes, he suffered on that cross for you because he knew that if he didn't then you could never have peace. The power of the resurrection of Jesus is what erases our fears, it erases completely leaving no evidence of what was written before, of the mistakes we made. And it is the same power of the resurrection that replaces what was erased with true peace and joy.

Not only does Jesus bestow his peace to his disciples but he also gives them a commission. "Again, Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." This is a natural result that comes from being overjoyed. The disciples just saw the risen Savior with their own eyes and now who wouldn't they want to go tell. In the same way, the peace we have from Jesus and the joy that comes from it gets us excited to go out and use the power of the God's Word to erase the fears of others and replace it with peace.

The disciples' lives have just changed forever, and they couldn't be more convinced, more overjoyed in what happened. You can imagine their excitement refusing to allow them to keep silent. But it doesn't take long for their outreach plans to encounter their first skeptic, Thomas, but Jesus would use this opportunity to show the power of the resurrection to erase doubt and replace it with undeniable proof of the risen Savior. Thomas was unwilling to accept the testimony of his follow brothers unless he sees the proof for himself. He is so convinced of his own reason, thinking that what the other disciples have been repeatedly saying to him that "we have seen the Lord!" cannot logically make sense by human standards. Even if the disciples were reminding Thomas of the times Jesus foretold his resurrection to them and how Jesus has fulfilled every promise during their time together. Thomas doubted and placed his sinful human reason above it all.

However, one week later out of that man's mouth comes the beautiful confession, "my Lord and my God!" The resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples again, this time specifically for Thomas because Jesus had some erasing to do because he had an important job for Thomas just like he did for the other disciples who were eyewitnesses of the resurrection. To the ends of the earth, they would go and spread the gospel and confidently confess without the slightest bit of doubt that Jesus, who was crucified, was raised to life for your salvation.

There are plenty of skeptics out in our world today too. And there seems to be a larger emphasis towards human reason more than ever before. In an ever-increasing skeptical world, doubts just seem like an everyday part of life. These doubts can creep their way into our own lives and cause us to stumble. How can we believe that anything is true? How can we be confident in the source of our peace? How confident can we be in the resurrection? This can lead us to doubt God and with the same ultimatum as Thomas, unless I see, I will not believe.

Jesus graciously came to Thomas and showed him his hands and side, but Jesus makes it clear that there is something far greater than having an eyewitness encounter with the risen Savior. We do not need to see to believe, Jesus says, “blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.” There would be some who saw the risen Jesus and did not believe so there must be something better than simply seeing. The proof that replaces our doubt is faith. That is what is better than seeing. Even though we have not seen Jesus physically we still believe in the empty tomb and his glorious resurrection. But it is important to understand that this faith is not a blind faith. We have the eyewitness accounts and testimonies given to us in God’s Word. And this word is powerful just like how earlier we found peace in same powerful Word of God, so also Jesus provides proof through it. We see this in the final verse of the gospel, “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Jesus gave us his Word because he wanted to erase your doubt and to replace it with faith in him. These are written that you may believe, God had you in mind when he gave us his Word. Having his Word is far better than being in that room on the first Easter. The disciple Peter who was in that room as an eyewitness even tells us this, “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.” We share the same joy as them not because we share the same eyewitness encounter as him, but because we share in the same faith.

When you look at the cross and empty tomb you see the tools God used to erase all your fear and doubt. When you hear and read God’s Word you see the cross and empty tomb and are reminded of the great love Jesus had for you through his death and through his glorious resurrection in which you have faith. Brothers and sisters, we can be confident in this even though we have not seen. We are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy because Jesus has erased our sins and replaced it with eternal life with him in heaven. Amen.