

**“Peace be with you.”**  
**Our Risen Savior Gave Us the Keys**  
✦ to free us from fear in holy joy (vv.19-20)  
✦ to free us from guilt for eager service (vv.21-23)

In the Name of our dear Savior Jesus, the crucified and risen Christ, dearly redeemed:

If only Americans knew as much about **the Keys** of Christ as they do about car keys! Toddlers hide them. Teens want them. The elderly want them back. My first key conversation was strange.

Out of the blue: “Mark, I want you to get your driver’s license. I’ll pay for your insurance.”

“Mom, this is not right. I’m supposed to come to you demanding to get my license. Then we’re supposed to argue about it for a while. Why are you asking me?”

Turns out we needed drivers for family activities. Now I remember how my mother actually wanted to give me the car keys. And she has probably forgotten the time I took a group of friends up in the mountains in her Pontiac Grand Safari station wagon and wiped out the exhaust on a rock.

Grace is like that: Give what we don’t deserve; forget what we’ve done wrong; add useful service. Today we hear such sweet words, **“Peace be with you,”** as **Our Risen Savior Gave Us the Keys...**

✦ to free us from fear in holy joy (vv.19-20)

As car keys open many roads on earth, Christ’s **Keys** open the way to heaven. And looking at Jesus’ disciples on that first Easter evening, Christ’ **Keys** bring us out from hiding behind locked doors. Danger was real. King Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, would soon execute James the elder brother of John. Jesus’ disciples were targets of tyranny and unbelief. They had just witnessed His crucifixion. Now their fears mounted as they doubted His resurrection. Doesn’t that happen to us too?

You’ve heard the story of Dr. Martin Luther looking up to see wife Katie dressed in black. “Who died?” he demanded. “Jesus is dead,” answered Katie. The good doctor replied, “Christ is risen!” “If Christ is risen, why are you going about so glum as if He’s still dead?” Yes, good Christian, why?

*On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you!”<sup>20</sup> Having said this, he showed them his hands and side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.*

See what it takes to **free us from fear**? Jesus cannot wait for us. We hide behind busy schedules, popular friends, music, money, sports and entertainment – often trying to ward off **fear** of living. But then life slows down, loneliness deepens, anxiety swells, health suffers. Panic can crush your chest like a heart attack. The doctor says, “Avoid stress,” and you’re thinking, “Right!” Anyone figured that one out yet? Raising kids, running errands – where’s the rest? While eyes are failing, forms keep multiplying. You think you’re covered, but you find your health insurance is only good in another state!

But then comes Jesus with the **“peace of God which surpasses all understanding, that guards our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.”** (Philippians 4:7 TPA) Jesus calls us with powerful

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotes are from a draft translation by the undersigned for the Wartburg Project – John.

words that grant what they say: ***“Peace be with you.”*** His hands with the nail marks and His side with the spear scar still showing, are evidence of how deeply He loves us. No price was too high for Him to take our fear away. **Our Risen Savior Gave Us the Keys – to free us from fear in holy joy.** Jesus’ first disciples saw His hands and side. They were delighted, glad, filled with **holy joy** to know He lives...

✠ **to free us from guilt for eager service (vv.21-23)**

*Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”*  
<sup>22</sup>*After saying this, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>Whenever you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”*

Sound familiar? At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked: ***“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”*** After several answers His key question: ***“But what about you? Who do you say I am?”*** Peter’s answer was plain and simple: ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*** The Greek original shows Jesus built His church not on Peter, but this confession. To Peter as leader Jesus said, ***“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*** (Matthew 16:13-19 NIV84) **The Keys** lock and unlock heaven.

The Holy Spirit in the Bible shows Jesus gave **the Keys** to all His disciples, to everyone who believes in Him as Lord and Savior. This special power and right Jesus gave in Matthew 18: ***“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”*** (Matthew 18:19f NIV84) Jesus calls for forgiveness to the penitent and no forgiveness for any who refuse to repent.

Papists who insist only Peter got **the Keys** don’t tell sinners they’re forgiven. And they make three impossible demands: *Confess every sin. Feel perfect contrition and heartfelt regret. Do penance prescribed by the priest.* None of that comes from God who already forgave all sin. Sadly, many Protestants require you must feel sorry enough, feel faithful enough, feel joyful enough to be forgiven.

Aren’t you glad it’s God’s forgiveness we need, not theirs? **Our Risen Savior Gave Us the Keys – to free us from guilt. Eager service** follows in joyful gratitude. This is because Jesus took all our **guilt** on Himself as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Don’t look at yourself and your own feelings or the satisfaction someone demands. Look at Jesus! He wiped out the record of our sins by His perfect life and innocent death in our place. The Holy Spirit says through Paul: ***“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV84) First, God gives us His **righteousness** and the faith to receive it. Then He shows His holiness by using our hands for God in the joyful eagerness of faith. Faith alone saves, but faith is never alone. Easter shouts God is satisfied. Jesus said, ***“It is finished.”*** By raising Jesus from the dead the Father says, ***“It is finished indeed!”*** Christ commands His disciples to ***“preach the Good News to all creation”*** (Mark 16:15), which says, ***“You are reconciled to God.”*** All Christians, including you children, have **the Keys**. When people are sorry, tell them they’re forgiven before God in heaven. When not sorry, they’re not forgiven in heaven either. (Walther’s *Law & Gospel*, Thesis IX)

Here we come together and plead guilty of all sins, known and unknown. We don’t need lists because ***“the blood of Jesus, [God’s] Son, purifies us from all sin.”*** (1 John 1:7 NIV84) We call pastors to announce this full and free forgiveness in Jesus’ Name. And when you as God’s people say, ***“Amen,”*** you are declaring this is true. You are saying to each other, ***“Your sins are all forgiven.”***

Now that **Our Risen Savior Gave Us the Keys**, my dear friends, we ought to guard and treasure them like a teenager with the car keys. The Holy Spirit supplies a stout keeper for **the Keys**, called Word and Sacrament. Do not doubt, but firmly believe. Your sins are forgiven before God in heaven. Amen.