**“Blessed Are Those Who Have Not Seen But Come to Believe” 2016 04 03, John 20:19-31, Pr. H. Adachi**

May Grace and Peace be poured into the hearts of the people in this sanctuary!

Don’t you think we are seeing too many news stories highlighting the abusive and violent language from one of the presidential candidates?

I wonder why media need to say again and again about that particular candidate. There have been many moments when we hear harmful comments not really appropriate in any setting.  Many comments are aimed degrading certain groups of people. Does the media need to broadcast every detail of what he said?

However, we have the freedom of speech and the press, and we reserve the right to proclaim loudly the good news also.

The Gospel text given today describes two incidents: one was happened in the evening of the day Jesus resurrected. And the other incident was about a week later. The empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus were not easy to believe for apostles. Therefore they were fearful since they might be crucified also and they were inside the room with the door locked.

Then Jesus appeared among apostles. Just on the previous Friday, Jesus was betrayed, arrested, abused, stabbed, nailed, crucified, and he died on the cross. He was buried in the tomb.  If it were current age, such violent act might have not been broadcasted publically.

However, it was recorded in the Bible...  Not only the brutal scenes but also the wonderful scenes were all recorded in the Bible, as we read this morning. Jesus did not accuse the apostles at all, but he said “Peace be with you.” The apostles who could do nothing to prevent the crucifixion were forgiven. Jesus talked to them mercifully and graciously. The apostles felt joy by the resurrected and merciful Jesus. However, Thomas who was not there only heard about the story Jesus was resurrected from other apostles.

Thomas could not believe the resurrection at all. He said, “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.” For us who became Christians without seeing resurrected Christ, the words Thomas said seem a bit rude and even violent...

But Jesus appeared to the apostles again a week later, and this time Thomas was there. Jesus’ word was the same, he said again, “Peace be with you.” He did not accuse Thomas at all and accepted him as he was. Then, he said “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.”

Of course, Thomas believed Jesus this time and left an important confession, saying “Oh my Lord, my God.” Then Jesus mentioned also the important word not only to him but also to all people in the world: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

In the word Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,” I feel Jesus blessings for the people who came to believe after the times of the apostles.

However, because of intellectual interest, and freedom of speech (at least in our countries where we live or lived either in US or Japan,) I understand that there are people who insist “I cannot believe,” and it is reality there are many who deny Christianity.

But for us who believe the death on the cross and the resurrection from the tomb, we believe in God’s forgiveness and Christ’s mercy. Whether or not people believe in Him, Jesus, the Lord, is loving all people whom God created.  Even for people who deny Christ, God’s love is poured to them.

For the politicians who say abusive/violent words, for the people who abuse and even kill Christians, and for us who often turn from God, God is pouring his love abundantly... We know because of the word Jesus said to apostles, “Peace be with you” without accusing them. His mercy is unconditional. Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. There are true blessings in those who believe in Him.  Can we share the word Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe”? Yes, our Lord, God, is guiding us to share this true blessing. Amen.