

### **John 20:19-31**

*When 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." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

*But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So 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."*

*A 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." Then 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." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."*

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But 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.*

I am constantly reminded that understanding and embracing our faith is not easy. It takes effort, time, and dedication. Here's a statistic for us on the first Sunday after Easter, one of the most sparsely attended Sundays of the year. The average mainline churchgoer spends about 1.5 hours each week connecting to God. That is nine tenths of one percent of their life in the combined pursuit of worshipping, and learning, and serving the Savior they believe in. That statistic holds true for the weekly church attendee. In today's real world, however, that defines regular church attendance as once or twice each month, the average mainline Christian spends about two to four one thousandth of their existence trying to draw close to God. I'm not going to do the math on those who attend only on Christmas and Easter.

Now, of course, I am speaking in generalities. Every individual is unique. Every individual congregation is unique. Even so, I am pretty sure that we would all agree that it is not possible

for people to effectively draw near to God and build a relationship with our Risen Lord by investing so little time and effort. Just ½ of 1% of ourselves to God. 99.5% on the rest.

I bring this up this morning because, as I said, understanding our faith and drawing closer to God takes effort, time, and dedication. Living a Christian life and following Christ requires more than ½ of 1%. One of our biggest challenges, as believers, is trying to come to an accurate understanding of what Jesus said.

Now, it is not that it wasn't reported accurately. All indications are that those who wrote down Jesus' words were faithfully striving to convey the truth of what actually took place and what was actually said. After all, there are so many things that they would not have reported, if they were trying to massage the message in order to make themselves and their cause look good. We saw some last week. The Gospel writers reported that Mary thought that Jesus was the gardener when she first encountered him after the resurrection. They wrote that the disciples didn't believe the reports of the resurrection. They told how Peter denied Jesus during the trial and how Thomas, as we heard today, refused to believe unless he could actually probe the wounds. During their time with Jesus they argued about who was the greatest while Jesus was teaching humility. They vied for positions of command on Jesus right and left while Jesus taught servanthood. And they even stood in the way of the mission itself requiring Jesus, at one point, to tell one of them, Peter, their leader, to "Get behind me Satan!" Reporting such things about the leadership of this new movement, this new church, about themselves, would not have served a hoax well, but it does show their dedication to reporting the truth.

But time takes its toll. And the human language presents its limitations. We hear things differently today. For example, "Peace be with you." Jesus was not saying something like what the millennials might say today, "Peace out, man!" He was not simply greeting them with a, "Hey, Howya doin'?" There was more going on. "As the Father has sent me, so I also am sending you" is not simple chit-chat or filler conversation for an evening fellowship hour. "Receive the Holy Spirit" is not being used as part of a worship liturgy. Jesus is getting down to business. He has a mission for them; a very specific mission.

Here is where language and time can present a potential struggle for us in our day. If He went into that room on the night of His return to life and had a mission to convey, what was he communicating? It is important for us to understand that. Yes, I know. He is sending us, just like He did the original disciples. That seems pretty straight forward. Later he will say, for their sake and for ours, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

But how? What does it look like? How are we supposed to do it? Are we just to go forth and decide the process for ourselves? Go therefore into the world any-which-way you think is best and appropriate so long as you get everyone wet at some point in the name of the Father and the Son and The Holy Spirit? If that were the case, that would seem to be wrought with potential

problems? So, wouldn't He have given us a little more direction and guidance? Wouldn't He have provided more structure; more equipping and provisioning?

Well, I think He would and I think He did. I also think that we might go as far as to say that everything we need for our work as followers of Christ is within the experience and the words that Jesus used in that upper room, the words we heard this morning. "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I also send you. Receive the Holy Spirit!"

### **Peace Be With You...**

It is more than a liturgical statement half way through our service and it is beyond a simple greeting. Jesus, the Risen Christ, is proclaiming on to them Shalom. It is a powerful act comparable to any of His earthly miracles. You see, Shalom, in its full meaning, is not just about a comfortable feeling, although it certainly carries with it these feelings. It is not just about personal happiness, although happiness is found within it. Shalom is about wholeness and completion and perfection.

In that upper room, Jesus was giving them a profound gift. More than that, He was taking action for the sake of the ongoing mission. He was instilling within them shalom. He was transforming them, He was further re-making them, for a new and powerful life. He was preparing them for ministry.

"Peace be with you" was not just a way of saying, "Take five for things are about to get busy." It was, and is, their preparation and equipping for ministry.

### **...So I Also Am Sending You.**

You know, in the Greek the word for sent, or to send, has many layers of meanings. At its most basic, it could mean something like, "Go on...get outta here you crazy lug." It could also mean being sent on an errand, or sent on a journey, or sent as a companion. But as you go deeper in its meaning you start to find words like "nomination" and "insertion". It begins to take on more the feel of mission.

Jesus was saying to them that this is a heavenly mission that WE are on, together. The Father sent me and I am nominating and electing and equipping you. You are being inserted into the world with a mission to accomplish. That type of sending carries with it the feeling of being thrust forward into the world like a strike force, but it is not a strike force that brings death, but one that brings life.

### **As The Father Sent Me...**

And here is the key. Here is the how and the what. This is the structure and the game plan. They are being sent just as Jesus was sent. They have the same mission and the same work. He is their model for everything they are to do and how they are to do it.

They are to Love, but not just how the world typically loves. They are to Love their neighbors as they have been loved...fully and generously through an embrace that always leads towards God.

They are to teach, but not in pursuit of mere intellect. They are to teach about THE WAY that leads to life. They are to teach the truth of God, the truth of His creation, and the truth of His salvation.

They are to be an example. They are to be an example of a Godly life, being Godly role models, Godly heroes, and Kingdom proclaimers. Just as Christ was for them and for the world, They are to be a faithful example to all those they meet. They are to be authentic and committed followers so that when all people see them they will see a reflection of Christ and gain a vision of the fullness of life.

And they are to serve, just as Christ served, humbly, sacrificially, always seeking to submit his will to God's.

### **Receive the Holy Spirit**

...for guidance, provision, and holy companionship.

So as Christ said to his disciples on the evening of his resurrection in the language of deeper understanding, we can also hear it today... "Shalom. Be transformed and made whole. Be complete and renewed. We are being given a mission. We are being inserted into a plan, thrust into our world, in order to continue God's mission. Through that empowerment we are being sent to bring the message and reality of salvation to all people just as, in the same way as, Christ had been sent to do the same...through Abundant Love, Clear Teaching, Example of Life, and Humble Service. Receiving the Holy Spirit as our guide and constant companion."

Words to live and serve by.

Amen