

March 31, 2024

As You Are Going: Resurrection Sunday – “I am sending you”

John 20:19-23

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Intro...Theme

[Read John 20:1-10] The tomb is empty and he is risen! But just like every good informant, wait there's more! There's a lot more pages left in the NT after the resurrection of Jesus. Why? Because Jesus had completed his mission in complete obedience to the Father by laying down his life as an atonement for sin. But that was not the end of God's plan of redemption, Just like the words of a song by the Gaither Vocal Band, it was only the “end of the beginning.” Jesus didn't just come to the earth to die and rise again and that was it. No, he completed, or fulfilled, the requirements the Old Covenant, as the promised Messiah, and now then he ushered in the new. So there is more work to be done and that's what we have been discovering together here at the Vernon Church as we have been looking this year into the mission of God and how it is that we, as his followers, are invited to take part in it. And we see that mission through the words of Jesus as he meets with his disciples for the first time after his resurrection. I invite you to continue to follow along as I start reading again in vs. 19 of John 20.

[Read vs. 19-23]

The verses we just read describe the events of the evening of the same day that Jesus rose from the dead. He had appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden earlier that day, which we read about in the verses we skipped over for time sake to get to this passage, and now he appears to the disciples. And I want us to notice a few things right off the bat before we get to the main point of the message today. It's almost like it's own mini sermon, but it's important and I don't want us to miss it.

First, notice the amount of detail we are given in this passage. How is it that we know that this event took place, and where it took place and what the disciples were feeling at the time? Well, it just so happens that the author of the book, John, was there in that room as an eyewitness and could give a firsthand account of seeing the risen Lord, as well as, all the details of this passage. John wrote his Gospel many years after the events took place but he could recall, in great detail, everything that had happened that day because it was seared into his mind. Imagine, your best friend beaten and hung on a cross and you were there looking on trying to comfort his mother as he died. Only to have him standing before you a few days later now risen from the dead. I mean, who could forget something like that?

So, let's look at these details. Notice that John tells us the doors were locked. Jesus didn't knock. He didn't even have to open the door. He simply was there. And he wasn't a ghost or a disembodied spirit. Look at verse 20: “He showed them his hands and his side.” In Luke's account of this same event Jesus said to the disciples, “Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39). So, he has a physical body. But not exactly like ours: the same, yet different. He was simply there, in spite of the closed and locked doors. Which simply means that today in your life, the risen Jesus can go where no one else can go. He can go where no counselor can go. He can go where no therapist can go. He can go where no doctor can go. He can reach you anywhere and at any time. There is no place where you are, and no where you can go where Jesus cannot reach you. Psalm 139:7-10 says, “where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are

there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.” What an awesome God we serve.

The next detail John gives us is that the disciples were afraid. Verse 19: “The doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews...” This is understandable. Their leader had just been crucified and they were hiding for fear that they could suffer a similar fate for being associated with him. And into that fear Jesus comes. What are you afraid of this morning? What fear has you held so tightly in its grasp that you don’t see how you will ever be free of it? Enter the risen Jesus. The Bible tells us in 1 Pet. 5:7 to “cast all your cares [anxieties, worries] on him for he cares for you.” Jesus is saying to us by his appearance here to the disciples, “I come when you are afraid. I don’t wait for you to get your act together. I don’t wait for you to have enough faith to overcome fear. I come to help you have enough faith to overcome fear.” You see the opposite of faith is fear. Fear says, “I can’t.” Faith says, “Jesus can.”

The risen, living Jesus comes when we cry out to him in our fear. He helps us. He comes near with the promise: “Fear not I am with you, be not dismayed, I am your God, I will help you” (Isaiah 41:10). He will do this for you too, if you receive him into your life.

The last detail the John gives before we get to what Jesus said to his disciples, and to us, is that Jesus came and stood among them. Back to verse 19: “the doors were locked, the disciples were afraid, and Jesus came and stood among them.” The point here is that he came right into the middle of their meeting. He interrupted their evening. Whatever they were discussing or whatever they had planned for that evening, I bet they weren’t planning of Jesus showing up. You might have heard the saying before that, “Jesus is a gentleman, he will not go where he is not invited.” I am so glad that saying isn’t true. If it hadn’t of been for Jesus interrupting my life with his presence and a call on my life I would have continued living in my rebellion. The Bible says that’s true for all of us. Jesus runs after and chases the wayward and the prodigals. The Bible doesn’t describe a rebellious humanity that is seeking after God, but a loving God that pursues a rebellious humanity. The Apostle Paul himself, Acts 9, was on his way to Damascus to arrest and put to death Christians until the Lord Jesus interrupted his day. And he didn’t say, “Excuse me Saul, I don’t mean to be rude, but can we have a word?” No, he had a divine appointment with Saul of Tarsus that day and interrupted his life plans and totally turned his life around that day. Are you willing to have Jesus interrupt your life today?

Jesus wanted his disciples to see him and know him, to believe in him and love him. That’s what he wants for you today. And that’s what I want for you today. On today, of all days, on Resurrection Sunday, I want you to experience the living Jesus. To know him. To have him draw near into your life where no one else can go. To have him help you in your fear the way no one else can help you. And to have him come close to you, not calling to you from a distance, but coming right into your midst. That’s what I pray happens today.

All that, and we haven’t even gotten to what Jesus said yet! We’ll spend the rest of you time this morning looking at the three things Jesus says in this passage as it sets the framework of what we have been talking about for the last several months. And the things that Jesus says in this passage turn out to be three gifts that he offers to us. The peace of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the purpose of mission.

So what did he say? Two times he said, “Peace be with you.” Starting at the end of vs. 19, “...[he] said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you.”

We don't initiate peace with God, He initiates peace with us. As I indicated earlier, it's God who pursues us. We don't initiate anything. And before Jesus says anything about the power of the Holy Spirit or our purpose or mission he wants to establish peace. The order here is really important. The peace that Jesus gives is before and underneath anything that can say or do for the sake of Christ. The apostle Paul explains it like this: "He [Jesus] himself is our peace, who has made us both one [Jew and Gentile] . . . and reconciled us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility" (Ephesians 2:14–18).

The peace that Jesus offers the disciples is peace that he accomplished when he died for them on the cross. That's why in verse 20 he says, "When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side." I am the one who died. I am the one you abandoned. And I am the one who was "pierced for your transgressions." And the reason I can offer you peace is because by my blood I have covered all your sins. They longer count against you before God. If you trust in Jesus, your sins won't be held against you and the wrath of God is turned away. That's what Paul meant when he said, "Christ reconciled us both to God through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." All the hostility between God and us was absorbed on the cross. Jesus says, "look at my wounds. I made peace with these. Justice was satisfied with these. Peace between you and God was established with these, and by these wounds you are healed." (eluded to in Isaiah 53)

So, what does this peace that Jesus brings look like in our life? First and foremost, when we put our faith in Jesus we have peace with God. That's why God sent Jesus, so that God's justice and wrath could be satisfied. God makes peace with us by substituting his Son for us. We no longer stand before him condemned. Now he comes to us in peace, not as judge, but as a loving Father.

We also can have peace with others who are in Christ. To be reconciled to God is to be reconciled to all who are reconciled to God. Galatians 3:28 says that in Christ, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). We are made one and all serve the resurrected Lord.

And we can have peace within ourselves. Hebrews 9:14 says, "The blood of Christ . . . will purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God." What a gift to have the peace of a clear conscience. How many people are crushed under the weight of a guilty conscience. Maybe I have just described you this morning. You have regrets of your past mistakes. You have trouble forgiving yourself for the things you have done. Peace doesn't mean that past sins are no longer painful. It means they stop being paralyzing. The pain may not be taken away immediately, but the penalty is taken away through Christ. And that makes it possible to heal and have peace.

How do we get this peace that Jesus speaks of? It's not automatic. Everybody doesn't just have it. It's a free gift of God but we must receive it. Or, in other words, we receive him. He alone is our peace. If you have the risen, living Christ as your Savior, you have the peace that he gives. "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). "Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Jesus offers you his peace. Peace with God. Peace with others and peace even within yourself. It is free. I hope you receive it today.

I've spent most of our time today on the peace with God that Jesus offers us because it is foundational for everything else. If we don't have peace with God, through a relationship with Jesus Christ, everything else falls apart.

The last two statements of Jesus in our passage speak of the power of the Holy Spirit and the purpose of mission and both are mentioned in verses 21–22: Jesus said to them again, "Peace

be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” (that’s the purpose) And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (that’s the power.) Jesus was going to pour out the Holy Spirit when he ascended into heaven just as he had promised the disciples in the upper room during the Last Supper we read about in John 13-16. And that happened about seven weeks after his resurrection. And we’ve covered that as we’ve gone through the first couple chapters of the Book of Acts together. The point here is that the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus gives is that he makes us able to do what we are simply not able to do on our own.

Vs. 22 says that Jesus, “...breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” He was saying realize that my breath, my life, my word, everything that I am, will come to you in the Holy Spirit. We’ve seen this promise before in John 14. Jesus said, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18). The risen, living Jesus is no longer in the grave but has come to us through the Holy Spirit. His Spirit. This power is our only hope for accomplishing the purpose, or the mission, he has for us. And he gives that purpose at the end of verse 21, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” Jesus was saying to his disciples, and is saying to us, “I want you to live in the world as my representatives. My ambassadors. I want you to take my peace and take my power, and glorify my Father the way I have by fulfilling the mission he has for us.”

Jesus comes to us and gives us his peace with God. And he gives us the power of the Holy Spirit to do the kinds of things that we can’t do on our own like defeating our own selfishness, and loving other people, and treasuring Christ above everything else. And then having that peace with God and the power of the Holy Spirit he gives us our purpose of mission: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” I’m sending you to offer my peace to the world. I am going to my Father. But I won’t leave you as orphans, I will give you my Spirit that will empower you to accomplish the mission that I am giving you. What a glorious thing, the plan of God.

I’ll close with verse 23. It’s a puzzling statement, but a good way to end and so here’s what I think it means. Jesus says to the disciples: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” What he means is this: When you are going about your day and being obedient to God by doing your part to fulfill his mission by telling people about what he has done, I am the one speaking through you in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that if anyone believes in me, I will forgive their sins. And if anyone does not believe, I will withhold my forgiveness. We do not have the authority to save or condemn anybody. God alone is the righteous judge. We are simply his vessels to be used to do his will.

So, as a minister of the Gospel, I urge you, if you have not yet received Christ as your savior be reconciled to God. Receive the free gift of salvation and peace with God that Jesus offers. Receive his power through the Holy Spirit and his mission for the Church which gives us purpose with all of this being accomplished by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus which we celebrate today. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive. And we still have work to do. Let’s pray.

Benediction:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.