

Sending YOU!

April 27, 2014

John 20:19-31

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe." 26 Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

It has been almost a year since I last preached on this scriptural message and played that provoking song "Doubting Thomas". The doubting Thomas is the image we tend to dwell on when reading this perichophy of scripture. We recognize and resonate perhaps with Thomas's doubt and uncertainty and need for tangible evidence. We read this and focus on the second part and tend to gloss over that first part when Jesus first meets again with his Disciples in the very upper room he had met with them to have the last supper before he died on the cross. Those Disciples are also doubting just as much as Thomas did.

You see it is important to note when this event occurs in our timelines of Jesus' life. This is after he has risen from the dead, after dying a horrifying death by crucifixion, after he had been turned over by one of their very own to the authorities. The Disciples are again gathered together with their Lord but this gathering is very different from the first gathering. The Disciples who have gathered were not there when they crucified their Lord. They had hidden, scattered, ran, or even denied knowing Jesus. They were not there to watch him nailed to a tree, or tormented by mockers, they were not there to have heard his final words of forgiveness.

I do not know and assume most of you have not watched the just ended "How I Met Your Mother" series. But in one of the seasons episodes Marshall one of the main characters loses his father and the entire funeral begins to revolve around the last words spoken to each of the family members. Marshall frets because the last words of his father were not some profound words of wisdom or some special moment like his other family members. We can all relate to this if we consider loved ones we have lost some of us even live with extreme guilt for whatever last words were said.

Consider this in light of the Disciples and what they must be experiencing. Jesus' last words to most of them were in the very room in which they sat. The most profound of which that his body was broken for them and his blood shed for them. Then he went to die a horrible death and although the women said he had risen they had yet to see him all they knew was his grave was empty.

But suddenly the Lord appears to them and says "Peace be with you" which is the customary greeting. He then shows them his hands and his side and then he says again "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."

Peace be with you, is a customary greeting and welcome. To say it again however means something more behind Christ's words to his fearful and distraught disciples. He is literally offering them forgiveness and trust again. You can almost sense the change in the room as he is recognized and then offers them peace for all their thoughts and doubts of what they had been called by Jesus to do.

Because that is the crux of it. Their leader had not just left to go to another position, he was brutally killed for the very reasons he had called them to follow him. Would you not too be confused and doubtful if everything you had been doing and were believing in or trying to believe in up to that point was suddenly wiped away? Jesus' death and the betrayal of Judas to make it happen was a very nasty pull of the rug from under the Disciples feet. Their foundation had been unceremoniously ripped out and they were probably in good conscious going "what do we believe in now, who do we believe in now, who do we follow now?"

We inherently in our faith feel an immense amount of guilt for asking God simply why? For a lot of inherited reasons we struggle to accept that in a relationship it is okay to ask why of another. It is okay to question, and okay to doubt. This is some of what this scripture is saying to us as we delve further into interpretation and understanding.

Because in the end Christ says, peace be with you, as the Father has sent me, even so I send you. He the risen Christ says let your fears and your doubts be at peace. One scholar puts it best in how Christ is in this passage saying: "I, on my side," he [Christ] said, "am proving that your doubts of me are ungenerous and wrong. And I want you to know that whatever you have done and whatever you have been, I still trust you, and still believe in you; want you to take it in that God's love is big enough to cover your case, your need, your sin; and God's power strong enough to lift you up above all that; want you to accept and to walk in the sunshine of God's forgiving grace."

To look at it another way Paul reminds us in Romans 5:1 to have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Once we have accepted the peace that comes with acknowledging the forgiving Grace of God we are able to move forward and be sent with the necessary tools of our trade.

Did you not know we have one tool given to us that makes all things possible? We have heard it time and time again have we not? "With God all things are possible" a common slogan and reminder. Because it is the Gospel truth. We are learning about it again today as we study this passage in the Gospel of John. You see Christ has said "even so I send you." Then he breathed on them and said "Receive the Holy Spirit".

We do not always talk about the profound nature of the Holy Spirit except around Pentecost but this here is what we need to remember. It is the biggest and best and only tool we need in our toolkits of faith. Christ sends me, he sends you, he sends each of us not alone because he does not ask us to do the impossible. Recall that for many believing and sharing that belief seems an impossible task particularly today with how we almost have to keep our faith locked inside our beautiful church walls otherwise the world will persecute us and call us out to be followers of Christ or call us out to be hypocrites in our beliefs. Those Disciples had it tough did they not hidden behind the locked doors of the upper room?

But Christ sent them out and sends us out with the profound power of the Holy Spirit in our arsenal. Because the Holy Spirit is the representation of God and Jesus present within us. We have with our faith a part of God and Jesus as a part of us. With God all things truly are possible. Alone we cannot be send forth but with Christ we can do anything.

Pray with me:

Lord send us, send us beyond these doors, beyond the locked doors of our minds, and of whatever walls we have built to hold our faith in. Help us to trust in the power of the Spirit that is the guide you have blessed us with. Help us to continue to trust in you. Help us Lord to acknowledge in our hearts that with you, your Son, and your Spirit, all things are truly possible when we believe. Amen.