

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 20:19-31 and various

"I Am Sending You"

There was something in the first reading (Isaiah 61:1-4) "*They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.*" Do you know who Isaiah was talking about? Us --- Us! Paul in his letter to the Romans, he said, "*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*" (Romans 10:13) There are no hoops to run through, there is no special activity that you need to do, just call on the Name of Jesus. Isn't that a blessing.

Today's Holy Gospel is quite unique. We get to be a "fly on the wall" during Easter Sunday evening, as apostles and disciples are in the upper room. The Risen Jesus appears to the disciples in that locked room. Remember, the term 'disciples' means 'followers,' this church is filled with disciples, and then there were 12 apostles, but this time there only eleven because Judas had killed himself, and as we will learn later in this reading that Thomas is not among them, but other followers were there. Jesus immediately greets them by giving them His shalom, His peace. He shows them His nail scars, and once again He gives them His peace - and then says, "*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."* Jesus gives them the gift of His peace – but then He showers them with the Holy Spirit! Jesus had said so much already about this 'Spirit,' His own Spirit, the Holy Spirit, which is the Father's special gift to His people.

The time had come, not for Jesus to give them new 'spiritual experiences,' or to set them apart from all the other people, but it had come so that they can do, for the whole world, just what Jesus had already been doing in Israel. Jesus told them, '*As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.*' That's the clue to it all. How does the message He preached, which made so much sense in first-century Israel, spread to other cultures and peoples? The people,

- who aren't thinking about God's kingdom,
- who aren't waiting for a Messiah,
- who don't look at the world like that at all?

'As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.'

In John 4:22 Jesus revealed that '*salvation is from the Jews.*' That might be a new thought to some of you, but that is where it started. It is coming out of Israel, for the whole world. Now the salvation Jesus has brought to Israel is to come from the Jewish world, and go out to the rest of the world of the Gentiles - us. Who is supposed to bring that Word of salvation? The answer is clear – Jesus told them, '*as the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.*' From this day forward they are to begin the process of preaching the 'good news,' the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Did you notice that I said process? It will not happen overnight – but with Jesus' giving them the Holy Spirit – and more – they will soon leave this locked room and venture out into the world. But, as we heard later on in this Gospel reading from John chapter 20 – more still had to be done.

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Jesus has died and rose from the grave, and has begun the work of new creation – and it is pretty important and noteworthy to see that this all took place on the first day of the week – the same day that Jesus walked out of his tomb. Now, in the new creation, the restoring life of God is breathed out through Jesus. He is making new people of the disciples, and, through them, offering this new life to the world. Remember I told you that Jesus gave them His peace twice, this is the peace that Jesus promised them in the upper room, on the night that He was arrested. Listen to these words from John 14:27, Jesus told them, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* This is the very same peace that He promised in John 16:33 saying, *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* This is so encouraging!

Next. Jesus gave them a very important ministry to carry out in His Name: They are to pronounce, in the Name of God, and by His spirit, the message of forgiveness to all people who believe in Jesus. They are also to ‘retain sins’: to warn the world that sin is a serious, deadly disease, and that to remain in sin will bring death. They are to rebuke and warn –

- not because they don’t like people,
- or because they are seeking power or prestige for themselves,
- but because this is God’s message to a jumbled, confused, mixed up and still rebellious world.

And so in giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit it was an ordination of sorts, Jesus told them, *“If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”* (John 20:23) These Apostles were now no longer just followers or disciples of Jesus – but ministers to His people – in His Name and by His Holy Spirit. The power to forgive sins or not – in Jesus’ Name.

Twenty years later, the Apostle Paul clearly spoke of the people that the ministers of God would face - believers and non-believers, *“For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.”* (2 Corinthians 2:15-17) Paul asked, *“Who is equal to such a task?”* The answer is – nobody - none of us, but God enables us to do it by the power of His Holy Spirit.

The one who was missing from this blessed visit was Thomas, one of the twelve, also called ‘Didymus’ – which means ‘a twin or a double.’ When he returned to the locked room, the others told him so excitedly that they had seen Jesus. Here Thomas reveals just a little bit of skepticism – as he told them, *“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”* (John 20:25) Basically, Thomas was telling the others – “oh really?” “And I wasn’t there?” Think about it, how would react? Can you imagine his frustration? Well Jesus knows our needs and He

Second to the Last Sunday of Epiphany [Mission Sunday] – February 24, 2019, Year C provides for them. A week later, He appears in that locked room, and of course gives them all His peace, His shalom, saying “*Peace be with you.*” (John 20:26) Next, Jesus goes right over to Thomas, the one who had been missing and had told the others his conditions if the Lord came again, for him to believe. And so Jesus said to Thomas, “*Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.*” (John 20:27)

What was Thomas’ reaction? He says, “*My Lord, and my God!*” (John 20:28) Can you just imagine how he must have felt? I can just picture in my mind’s eye that he must have fallen to his knees, and probably with tears in his eyes said ‘my Lord and my God’ – proclaiming it. Thomas is overwhelmed and he is the first person to look at Jesus of Nazareth and address Him with the word ‘God’ directly to Him. Jesus’ reaction to Thomas speaks not only to him, but to all believers, Jesus told him, “*Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*” (John 20:29) To everyone on a Sunday morning, who is sitting in church, working their way through a sermon, hearing the raindrops, or the fans going overhead, - we are here because we believe – because God comes first. Jesus blesses us because we have not seen, but still believe.

This, the second to the last book of John’s Gospel, takes us right back to the beginning of this Gospel: “*in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” (John 1:1) “*No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.*” (John 1:18) These people, followers and ministers in Jesus’ Name have seen the Risen Lord, the Messiah, and they will go through Galilee and Jerusalem, meeting several times with Jesus, and each time He will encourage them, offer them His peace, and give them more to do for His Kingdom.

- In John 21 – Jesus reinstates Peter and charges him, and the others to be shepherds of His people. Do you remember – “Peter do you love Me” three times to undo the three denials?
- In Matthew 28:18-20, on a mountain in the Galilee, Jesus came to them and said, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” He is telling them they are not alone – that He is going to be with them forever!
- Jesus was not yet ready to ascend to the Father, for He had more to tell them. On the Mount of Olives, across from the city of Jerusalem Jesus had one last promise and one last job for them. He told them that in just one week, the Day of Pentecost was coming, and “*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*” (Acts 1:8) With these words, Jesus then ascended into heaven, and from their view.

In just one week after Jesus’ ascension, fifty days from the Passover, on the Day of Pentecost, in Jerusalem, the church would never be the same again, because these ministers and their followers would be anointed by the Holy Spirit in mighty way, given power and boldness, no

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more hiding, to take the Gospel to the whole world. Their message - is to believe in Jesus, and so, through faith, you will have life in His name. *“In him was life, and that life was the light of men.”* (John 1:4) Their mission was in the words Jesus spoke to them, and they passed on to others, *“as the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”* (John 20:21) May we hear those words and do what He is telling us.