

ON BEING SENT

John 20:19-23 Text vs. 21 *“Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you,”*

The disciples feared the Jewish leaders after Jesus was crucified. They gathered in the Upper Room, with the doors locked. It was the evening of the first day of the week when Jesus came and miraculously stood among them and said, *“Peace be with you!”* Any doubts they may still have had about Jesus being alive were removed as Jesus stood before them with His hands where nails had been driven and His wounded side where a Roman soldier had thrust a sword.

Have you ever questioned Jesus existed? You wondered if the hope and faith you had was all a mistake? Those around you in church seem to be singing with joy, but you don't share in the joy they feel. You've been told God was there with you, but you haven't experienced Him for yourself? Does He have a presence in your life? You're a little filled with fear. Fear of what you've done in the past. Fear that God has left you. Circumstances are pressing down on you with such weight you can hardly bear it. Fear of life. Fear of what lay ahead. You lock the door to your house. Your bedroom. Even the door to your heart, so no one can get in and hurt you.

Those were the same feelings the disciples were struggling with that first Easter Day as two days ago their Lord had been crucified. He had been buried. Their ministry stopped. They had heard from some of the women who had gone to visit His tomb that Jesus was alive. But was it for real? Was it their imagination? Was it really as He said it would be! Was everything they heard Him say believable? Whatever doubts they may have had were quickly being replaced as He stood among them and said, *“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you,”* Then, He breathed on them and said, *“Receive the Holy Spirit.”* With that, they were ready to move forward with the Lord.

And there's nothing better for a fearful heart than connecting with the Lord. The world may seem dark to you. Sin may be running rampant in the streets. But Jesus is alive, today! He conquered all that Satan could send His way. There's no reason for you to live in fear. No reason for you to doubt anymore! Paul said, *“We are more than conquerors in Christ.”* When doubt comes your way remember, His Cross. His empty tomb. And that He promised to come, *again!* There's no reason for you to walk around with your head hanging down. You belong to the Lord! Jesus knew He would soon be going back to His Father in heaven. He wasn't about to leave His disciples alone without hope, or heavenly help. Soon, the disciples would have the Holy Spirit and power of God dwelling in them.

Now, the Day of Pentecost is *today*. The word *Pentecost* comes from a Greek word that means *fiftieth*. The Jewish Festival of Pentecost, called the *“Festival of Weeks”*, falls on the *fiftieth day after the original Passover in Egypt* when God gave a rolled-up scroll containing the *“Ten Commandments* called *Torah* to Moses at Mount Sinai. *Torah* means *“instruction.”* A guidance in life. And when Jews say *Torah*, they're speaking of the Five Books of Moses. The first five books of the Bible. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The foundation of all Jewish instruction and guidance.

However, for Christians, the celebration of Pentecost comes the 50th *day after the resurrection of Jesus*. The seventh Sunday after Easter. Today! The disciples received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. That story is in Acts 2 describing something *like* a powerful wind. *Like* tongues of fire, as the Holy Spirit was poured out on people from all over the world in Jerusalem who had come to celebrate the Jewish Passover feast. The *“Festival of Weeks.”* *“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound, like the blowing of a violent wind, came from heaven. It filled the whole house where the disciples were sitting. They saw, what seemed to be tongues of fire, that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them”* (Acts 2:1-5) which is fulfillment of the promise that Christ will baptize His followers with the Holy Spirit. This empowered the disciples, and others, to speak in many different languages the Good News of Christ's resurrection. Thousands of pilgrims from many lands now understood the Good News of Jesus. And the result was, over three thousand people were baptized.

And this Red stole around my neck, the paraments on the altar, the pulpit, and the lectern are all *Red*, making it the color of Pentecost. A reminder of the *“tongues of fire”*. Pentecost is the birthday of the church. Pentecost is the day for baptisms, as is Easter Day in much of Christianity. After baptism, the newly baptized should be trained in basic Christian doctrine, including the meaning of the sacraments, which are visible symbols of the reality of God to the believer. Sacraments help Christians for life in the church. Sacraments are a channel for God's grace. Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, and Reformed denominations define Baptism and Communion as *outward signs of an inward grace*.

The Season *after* Pentecost, which begins next Sunday, is the time for new disciples, together with the whole congregation, to carry out the gifts they have been given by the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus. Preaching. Teaching. Witnessing.

Twenty-two years after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, his coffin was opened. There were rumors his body was not in his grave. So, they opened it up. His body *was* there. That rumor continued fourteen more years. So, they opened it up again. Witnesses testified; Lincoln *was still* in his grave. Similar rumors began to spread after the death of Jesus when it was discovered His body was not in His tomb! Had it been stolen? As great a man as Lincoln was, there were witnesses to prove he was still in his grave.

And when rumors began spreading after the death of Jesus that His body was not in the tomb, according to the Bible over five hundred witnesses said they had seen Jesus. They had talked with Him. They had witnessed the resurrected body of Jesus.

So, our Gospel lesson this morning is a front row seat to watch the disciples move from doubt, to faith, and after they are commissioned, go out and share the Good News with others. It was with grace and hope they took their faith journey deep into God's love. Remember, the first thing Jesus said to His disciples after his resurrection was, "*Peace be with you!*" He said it *first* when He last saw the disciples before being crucified. Now, in the Upper Room standing with them He said it to them again. "*Peace be with you!*" They may have wondered how Jesus would react seeing them after they had abandoned Him hanging on the cross.

But the good news is, when you walk away from Jesus, when you leave Him, He's not going to punish you. You may walk away from Him. But when you open your eyes, you will see Him standing right there before you ready to grant you peace. Don't be afraid to confess your sin. Your failures. He will give you peace. Christ came to give you peace. And that peace is with God: "*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we now have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (Rom 5:1) You may have denied Him. You may have rejected Him. But He still extends His peace and accepts you, as did the father of the prodigal son accept his son back. Jesus gives you peace. He reveals Himself to you as He sends you out to work for Him.

One of the most effective ways to overcome despair is by having a purpose in life. When you have a job to do, you stop focusing on your own problems. You begin to look for the needs of others. An important task will add joy and meaning to your life. Jesus said, "*As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.*" If you are a child of God, and have been saved by His grace, you now have the Holy Spirit within you. You have the power of God dwelling within you continually! You have the Lord in person. And you have Him in power! The more you love Him, the more you want to serve Him. The more of His power you enjoy. His power doesn't rest on the unfaithful. But as you remain true to God, you can have the fullness of His power.

And there are countless benefits being committed and surrendered to Christ. When you look to Him in times of doubt, He will keep His promises! Christianity offers what no other religion does. It has hope in the future! Jesus can speak peace into your future. Dreams won't work, until you do! A dream without a plan, is just a wish. If you want your dream to come true, then set a goal. Start working toward it. Because the future belongs to those who never give up! Once you become fearless, your life becomes limitless. Wonderful things are achieved by those who live outside their comfort zone. That's when you can set your own limits. You become a powerful person, because you have the power of God helping you decide what's best for you. You don't have to live in fear *anymore*.

When Jesus passed through that locked Upper Room door and spoke those words to His disciples, He gave them a glorious future. He said, "*as the Father sent Me, so I am sending you.*" From that moment on, they turned the world upside down as they spread the Word. They were given a future beyond their wildest dreams! Jesus gave them a mission! A mission that really mattered. He commanded them to, *go into all the world teaching and preaching the Good News to every creature.* They had success beyond anyone's expectations. What He did for them, He'll do for you! The risen Christ is still *speaking to you!* He's alive and well. His words can be living, and working in you. His words can affect, and impact, every part of your life. Your *being sent* will help you overcome your past, and help you deal with your present. Then, you can believe in the future. "*Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you,"*"

Now, go do it! AMEN