

## **“As the Father has sent me...” John 20:19-29**

**“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and 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. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And 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 withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”**

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, 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 in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, 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; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, 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 believed.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

This is an amazing account. **“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews...”**. What was it like in that room, where doors were locked from inside, where air was thick with fear, where the disciples of Jesus had all the reasons to fear? What were those reasons?

For one, Peter had drawn the sword to protect Jesus when the official came to arrest Him and Peter obviously meant business. He probably wasn't trying to chop off the high priest's servant's ear. Most likely he was aiming for more.

Now, the Jewish leaders had captured Jesus, they had manipulated the crowd to ask to release the terrorist Barrabas, with their threats of blackmailing they had forced Pilate's hand to crucify Jesus. Jesus was dead. Gone.

On Friday the Jews were busy with Jesus. On Saturday it was Sabbath. Everything was quiet. Now, on the first day of the week, that would be the first item on the Jewish leaders' agenda, to finish what they had started. To squash this coup, to get rid of that little rubble. The disciples could have expected someone to show up any time. And someone, indeed, did show up.

There was no knock on the door. Nothing. Suddenly... **“Jesus came and stood among them and said to them: “Peace be with you.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side.”**

“Yes, yes, it is me! Come and see, and touch and believe, be assured, it is me, Jesus! And, yes, I am alive. I have arisen. Just as I told you. Just as I told you! You have to believe when I say something.” **“Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”** Fear and despair turned into gladness and joy.

But then Jesus continues: **“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”** Have you ever wondered, what exactly does this mean? “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

It is amazing how we can read the text, be familiar with it, even know it by heart, but miss something that may change our entire perspective. For example, in one of lectures one of my Ancient Greek professors asked us to pay attention to the famous John 3:16 passage. Remember that one?

**“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son”.** What does this mean? I guess that usually we understand it this way: “For God loved the world *so much*, that He gave His only Son”. He loved the world *so, so much*.

But the same verse contains another layer of meaning: “For God loved the world *this way*, that He gave His only Son”. See, it is not about how much, but *in which way*. God loved the world *this way*, that He gave His only Son. That changes how we hear this verse quite a bit, doesn’t it?

Now why do I bring this up? Because similarly we can read and understand this very famous, very well-known verse from our today’s Gospel reading. **“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”**

How do we hear this verse? I can tell you how I have always heard it, and it may be different for you. “As the Father has sent me, now I am sending you.” Meaning, “the Father was the One who sent me, and now it is me, I am sending you.”

I heard this verse as describing the unbroken chain of God’s messengers, first God the Father sent His Son Jesus, and then Jesus sent His disciples, and they in turn sent the next generation and the next, and so until today, when we are the ones who are sent.

But, till last week, I had never heard this verse in another way, which also makes perfect sense, and provides a very powerful complementary picture to what I was used to hearing. We could rephrase it this way: “I am sending you in that same way or the same manner as the Father sent me.” What was that manner? This is how Paul the apostle summarized it: “[Jesus] **emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**” (Phil 2:7-8)

This is how Dr Mark A Woods elaborates: “Think about what it meant for Jesus to be sent by His Father. It meant taking on human flesh and all of the brokenness that comes with it. It meant that He had to empty Himself of His power, glory and majesty to become like us. It meant that He had to step down from His rightful place of being honoured and praised. It meant that He had to live in the sorrow, suffering, and pain that is woven into our fallen world. It meant the cross.

We are being sent as the Father sent Jesus. This means that we can’t be His witnesses by simply sending a check to support evangelism. We need to take some risks, to endure some hardships, and engage people in their brokenness. This means that we have to step outside of our comfort zones and speak of Jesus with lost people even if it costs us friendships, career opportunities, or our popularity. It means denying ourselves, taking up our crosses daily, and following Jesus.”

And that is exactly how the Twelve apostles were sent. You may have heard how this being sent like “the Father sent Jesus” played out in their lives. The Church’s tradition tells (as recorded by Hippolytus of Rome and Eusebius of Caesarea) that Peter was crucified upside down, that Andrew his brother was crucified, tied to the cross for several days, and he still kept preaching.

James the son of Zebedee was decapitated, Phillip was crucified upside down, in other tradition – stoned, Bartholomeus was skinned alive and crucified, Thomas stabbed with spears, Matthew beaten till death, James the son of Alpheus clubbed to death, Simon the Zealot crucified, Mattias, burned alive, and the list goes on...

Quite a testimony! And on the other hand, it is almost surprising how little is known about the lives and fates of the Twelve who turned the world around by proclaiming the Good News. They certainly didn’t promote themselves, they sacrificed themselves to give glory to the One, who had visited them in that room and sent them.

**“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”** Jesus speaks also to us. To each one of you. Yes, to each one of you. **“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”** He is sending us with the same mission: **“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”**

But there is more to this sending as the Father sent Jesus than struggle and hardship. What helped Jesus to take on this mission? **“[Jesus] for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”** (Heb 12:2) Joy. Joy that He will be able to rescue you from the jaws of death and hell, that He will be able to reveal to you the depth of His love and commitment, the joy that He will gain your devotion, your loyalty and affection, and that He will be able to share His glory with you. This is what enabled Jesus to endure.

What about us? What would enable us to continue God's mission, to stay focused, to endure adversity and indifference, to keep going when things don't go our way? What about some amazing blessings, privileges and promises?

What are they? As the Father sent Him, now Jesus is sending you. Do you see what it means? That you are a part of God's greatest mission, members of an exclusive team, divine team, that you participate in building His eternal Kingdom. What a privilege!

But then, when Jesus sends us, remember what He says? **"Peace be with you!"** When Jesus speaks, it is not just a polite greeting. God's words are God's works, as Dr Luther put it. When Jesus says **"peace be with you"**, He gives you His peace. That peace which surpasses our understanding. That peace accompanies us when we take on His mission.

But then, Jesus gives you not only peace, He gives you His Spirit. **"He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit!'"** The same happens today, as Jesus speaks to us, as He sends us on His mission, He fills us with His Spirit.

But then, Jesus has not only sent us with the greatest mission He has also given us the greatest message, and also incredible authority. Incredible authority! **"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."** This is what you are sent to do. You have the keys to the heavenly Kingdom.

If you deliver the message of forgiveness, if you forgive someone their sins on behalf of Jesus Christ and by His command, you have opened for them the Kingdom of God. What an incredible authority, how precious the message entrusted to us! How could we possibly not search for opportunities to deliver this message!

But then, you are not sent alone. Jesus has provided for you fellow missionaries. So many of them. So that we can learn from one another, so that we can pray for one another, so that we can pool our wisdom, so that we can support one another in our shared mission, so that our joys are multiplied as we strive to be obedient to our Lord Jesus.

And then, as if that wasn't enough, Jesus promises: **"[As you go] I am with you to the end of the age."** The Son of God Himself accompanies us. No wonder, that is His Father's mission, He wants to make sure He supports and encourages us. He Himself walks with you as you set out to deliver His message to all people that He sends your way.

Finally, and this is how the Good News with our God works. There is a great reward involved. But... Your reward is already waiting for you. Jesus doesn't send you so that you can earn your salvation, or a place in New Heavens and Earth, or His Father's favour.

He is sending you, because you already have all those things. He is sending you as His brothers and sisters, and His co-heirs of His Father's Kingdom, He is allowing us, whatever unprepared and ill-equipped we may be, to help with His family business. He honours us by sending us. He allows us to share the glory of His great mission.

Each one of you. **"As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."** This is why we are here. This is how blessed you are. Amen.