

April 12th, 2026

“For the sake of joy.” 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!

If we understand what John has recorded for us, what Jesus says to us, it completely changes our life. The problem, of course, is that we struggle to understand, our sinful nature makes us obtuse and indifferent.

Still, the only thing we can do is to let the Word of God speak to us, to ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten us. **“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, doors locked from inside, air thick with fear, for the disciples of Jesus had all the reasons to fear. Peter had drawn the sword to protect Jesus when the government officials came to arrest Him and Peter obviously meant business.

He probably wasn't aiming to cut off an ear only. Now, the Jewish leaders had captured Jesus, 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! And, yes, I am alive. I have arisen. Just as I told you. You can trust me when I say something.” **“Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”**

April 12th, 2026

Fear and despair turned into relief and joy and Jesus continued: **“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”** Have you ever wondered, what exactly does that 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, one of my Greek professors asked us to pay attention to the famous John 3:16 passage.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son”. What does that 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 *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 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 you hear this verse?

Until recently I heard it like this: “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, then Jesus sent His disciples, they in turn sent the next generation and the next, and so until today, when we are the ones who are sent.

But then this verse was explained to me 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 *the same way* or in *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] “Think about what it meant for Jesus to be sent by His Father.

It meant taking on human flesh and all 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 of our fallen world. It meant the cross.

We are being sent as the Father sent Jesus. This means that 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.” [Dr Mark Woods]

That is exactly how the twelve apostles were sent. You may know how it played out in their lives. The Church's tradition tells that Peter was crucified upside down, that Andrew his brother was crucified, tied to the cross for several days, as he kept preaching.

April 12th, 2026

James the son of Zebedee was decapitated, Phillip was crucified upside down, 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!

At the same time, it is surprising how little is known about the lives of the Twelve. 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. But how could they do that?

Is there something that can help us to continue this mission? The answer is right here:

“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.” [...] 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.”

Let's highlight three elements that change everything. **Presence, power and direction.** Remember them, for this is what Jesus gives you too. What was the disciples' situation? They were lost. They had thought of themselves as Jesus' disciples. He had given direction and purpose to their lives. He had kept them safe, loved them and given them hope.

All of that was taken away with the hammer and nails on Good Friday. They were lost, drowning in fear. That is actually a pretty good description of the state of humanity without Jesus. But then, we get the first element. **Presence.**

The Risen Jesus appears among them and says: **“Peace be with you!”** As you may know, “peace” in the Biblical has a very rich meaning. Peace, shalom, is the state of being where everything is as it is supposed to be. When all the God-given longing of our hearts are fulfilled, when nothing is lacking. This is what God's presence gave them and gives you.

When Jesus comes among us, He makes you children of God the Father, His brothers and sisters, He welcomes you in His family, that is where you now belong and always will, no matter what. He tells you about His love for you and how much He values you, as He didn't spare His life, but gave it up for you.

He assures you that you are in His Father's arms, completely safe, and that He will never abandon you. He gives you the most wonderful hope to live for, the day when you will meet Him in His New Creation where He has already gone to prepare a place for you. God's presence gives you all of this. All that our hearts long for. Shalom.

This is how Job could be at peace even when he had seemingly lost everything. For God's presence with him granted Him what nothing else in this world could and so much more. This is what transformed apostles from timid and scared rubble to the fearless force whose powerful message transformed the world. The same peace Jesus gives to you.

But then, there was a second element. **Power.** **“[Jesus] breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit!”** When the Triune God decided to create and redeem the world, He didn't do it because He was lacking something. The very opposite is true. The Triune God lived in perfect love from eternity.

April 12th, 2026

That divine love is incredibly powerful. It is life giving. It cannot stand death. It is outward looking. It always seeks for more ways to express itself. This love is what Jesus gave His disciples; this is what He gives to you: **“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” Now this He said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive.”** [John 7:38-39]

See this powerful picture! Feel it! From your heart will flow rivers of living waters! Powerful rivers, not drops. Living water, life giving, death defeating! Because of the Spirit that Jesus sends to you as you come in His presence, as you listen to Him.

This is what Jesus gives to you. Something so powerful that breaks out of your heart like mighty rivers and seeks to bring life and well-being to everyone. That is how disciples were able to deny themselves and consider others as more significant. This is how Jesus makes you able to do the same.

The third element was... **direction**. Jesus gave a very specific direction, a very specific riverbed to those rivers of living waters that burst out of your heart. **“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them.”** The Good News about what God has done in Jesus. Or we can say the power of the keys that Jesus has entrusted to His Church. This is the direction He gave to His apostles; this is the direction that He gives us. Or should we say, privilege. “Go and tell all your loved ones what I have done for them!”

We have everything that our hearts long for in Jesus. Yes, you do! He fills you with His love and His Holy Spirit, so that you could carry His life-giving words into this world of death and sin and so take part in God’s Greatest Rescue Mission.

Remember these three! God gives you **His presence** and shalom, He fills you with His Holy Spirit and **the power to love**, and He gives you a **clear direction** how to express this love, when you speak the words of God’s forgiveness and bring eternal salvation to your loved ones. There is no greater gift, no greater service!

In conclusion, just one more thing. What was driving Jesus?

“[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] For joy! Jesus did it for the sake of joy to be able to deliver you, to embrace you, to have you as His own. This is what John declared too: **“We are writing these things [the Good News about Jesus] so that our joy may be complete.”** [1 John 1:4] Joy!

Yes, the apostles took part in God’s mission for the sake of... joy, to see others snatched from the jaws of death and brought into the fellowship with God’s saints. Joy that will last forever! And we are privileged to do the same. When we go sent by Jesus, when we let the rivers flow as directed by Jesus, He blesses us with joy, with divine joy. Without failing.

If we understand this, our lives are changed. May the Spirit use the words we heard to enlighten us; may the presence of God fill you with His shalom, with His Spirit and with abundant joy as we all strive to take part in this Great Mission.

Amen.