

John 20:19-23

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

John 20:19-23, 2017 Pentecost

This passage may sound very familiar to you, as if you had heard it recently,

and that would not be your mind playing games with you.

This passage is the appointed passage for every 2nd Sunday of Easter.

So it has been only a few weeks since you heard this gospel lesson.

But, this is a different context from the 2nd Sunday of Easter.

This is Pentecost.

And so how does that change what we receive from this lesson?

Lets take a look.

This passage opens with Jesus appearing in the locked up room and saying to the disciples,

“Peace be with you.”

By most understanding this is a common, normal everyday greeting meaning,

“May God give you every good thing.”

Then Jesus gives them a good thing—the commission the disciples and the church must never forget.

”Even as the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

This is the charter of the church marking its beginnings as the disciples will, within 50 days, begin preaching the message Jesus has given them;

...forgive the sins of any and they are forgiven; retain the sins of any and they are retained.

This is all about God's forgiveness, grace and mercy.

Jesus calls and depends on the disciples and the church to carry out this mission.

The disciples in that day, and the church even today become the presence, or the body of Christ as we hear from St. Paul in Ephesians

And [the Father] has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body...

And 1 Cor. 12:12

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ.

The church is necessary to deliver Jesus' message.

She is the mouth to speak,
the feet to walk—run—go,
the hands to do.

BUT,

The church as it is sent needs the one doing the sending to

give the message to be taken,
give power and authority, to the messenger
and the message itself,
to back the message,
to enlighten, strengthen and encourage the
messengers.

Even as the Father has sent me, so I send you.

The Father did send the Son, Jesus, into the world for a
specific purpose.

He sent him to deliver a message of God's love, grace
and mercy to a people,

a world that had for the most part turned their
backs on him,

and then to show them how great a love he has by
giving Jesus to suffer and die.

Jesus sending his disciples and his church into the world
parallels the sending of Jesus by the Father.

The entire gospel of John serves to reveal the
relationship between the Father and the Son,

and so between Jesus and the church.

Jesus serves in perfect obedience and love,

and so the church is called to do the same.

Jesus was sent with a particular message and so the church
is sent with a message as well,

and cannot propagate its own message.

Jesus was sent to follow the will of the Father and so the church is sent to follow the will of Jesus,

and cannot go on without the will and guidance he gives.

Here in this passage Jesus sends the church with the message of forgiveness for the penitent of heart

and to warn the impenitent that they are forfeiting the mercy of God;

Not because God withholds that mercy, but because that mercy can only be received with a penitent heart.

It is a great privilege of the church to convey the message of God's forgiveness,

and the perceived value of that message is dependant on the integrity of the messenger,

How well the messenger knows the sender.

How close is their relationship?

I thought about the privilege of conveying this message of forgiveness in the context of Holy Communion.

We come forward and gather around this table and through the bread and wine, the body and blood of Jesus we are forgiven.

I see the penitent heart come forward,. I see the tear in the eye and I see the joy of having received that forgiveness.

Jesus, from the very beginning, reflects the story of God throughout the ages even in this little encounter with the disciples.

He breathes the Holy Spirit on them and re-enacts the Genesis story where the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground,

and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;

and from the book of Ezekiel when the four winds breath on the dead in the valley of dry bones that they may live.

For in the Old Testament breath, wind and spirit are the same word in Hebrew.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is like the wakening of life in the dead,

and when the Holy Spirit comes on the church she is recreated.

This is the birthday of the holy church of Jesus Christ, and he sends the gift of his spirit on this day to the church.

He breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples, on each of you,

and sends you just as he was sent for you.