

John 20:19-23
(Isaiah 52:7-10; 1 Peter 1:3-9)
“As the Father Has Sent Me, Even So Am I Sending You”

Introduction

We, who are so remarkably blessed to live in a free and relatively safe place, know that much of the world is marked by violence, oppression, disease and death. And even we, with all the resources at our disposal, cannot finally protect ourselves from sadness, disease and death. They come, at last, to all.

In such a world, what difference did the resurrection of Jesus make to his first disciples, and what difference should it make to us today? Today, all around the world – *especially* in the majority world where people live in difficult situations of poverty and oppression – the stories come to us over and over again of God making all things new, raising people up from the dust of death and giving them new life. Trading their sorrow for joy, their brokenness for wholeness, their trouble for shalom.

How can this be? Look with me at five distinct actions Jesus took as described in our text, noting what each action meant to those first disciples, and what each should mean to us this morning.

Body

1. Jesus came and stood among them (20:19).

Just as God did not merely send us messengers to tell us of his love for us, but sent his Son to show us his love, so too Jesus did not merely send messengers such as Mary Magdalene to announce his resurrection, but he himself appeared among them. The apostle Paul tells us (1 Corinthians 15:6) that at one time during the forty days between his resurrection and ascension, Jesus appeared to more than five hundred of the believers, most of whom were still alive at the time of Paul’s writing, who could verify what they had seen and experienced together.

Jesus always shows up for those who are truly seeking him with all their heart, who want him and will welcome him. Why should this surprise us? Didn’t he say, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened” (Matthew 7:7&8)? The question is, “How exactly does he show up today?”

2. Jesus spoke words of peace to them (20:19).

His disciples were understandably terrified, first that the one whom they believed to be God’s Messiah had been arrested, brutalized and executed, and

now – even more – that the one who had been killed, wrapped in spices and burial cloths and buried, was now standing in the room with them. Dead people don't come back to life and show up for dinner.

Jesus speaks directly to their fear: "Shalom! Peace be with you!" In this world we have many reasons to fear, many things that threaten to crush us and those we love, to rob us of the people and things that give us joy and meaning and a reason to live. But Jesus says in effect, "What can separate you from my love for you? I have triumphed over the sin that separates you from God, and over death that separates you from life and from those you love. I have made a way for sinners to be righteous, and for the broken to be made whole, for the dead to live again. Nothing can separate you from my love. Death itself is now for my disciples merely the door to everlasting life.

This is as true today as it was then. Have you yet heard him speak his shalom into your troubled life? But, again, how does he speak that word to us today?

3. Jesus showed them his scars (20:20).

How can a holy God forgive the likes of you and me? Sometimes I even find it hard to forgive myself, much less others. If I am so hard on injustice and bad behavior and want it punished, how can a holy God forgive what is completely contrary and utterly repugnant to his character? Jesus shows us his scars. "But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5&6).

God is able to wipe clean the record of our sins for one reason alone: because our debt has been paid in full by Jesus, who gave his perfect life in place of our broken lives. And God is able to give us new life for one reason alone: because death could not hold this perfect life, could not crush and extinguish it, and in his victory over death, Jesus released us from death's power.

And what of you this morning? Are you still holding fast to your rebellion and sin, or do you long for the forgiveness that can only be yours through the sacrifice of God's Son?

4. Jesus entrusted them with his mission (20:21).

I've asked twice how we are to see Jesus and hear him speak peace to us today. Jesus did not go through all of this so that we could receive his grace and then return to our selfish, aimless lives. He saved us so that we might take up his ministry: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." Our life's mission is now quite simply to continue what Jesus started. He told

broken sinners of God's love and we are to do the same. He showed them God's love in his life and death, and we are to do the same. He gave his life to save us, and he calls us to give our lives – our hopes and dreams – to save those whom he has entrusted to us. He loved the unloved and unlovely and expects us to do the same. He ate with outcasts and sinners and wants us to seek the lost and lonely and show them his love for them. He wants us to live in such a way that people will have reason to believe the gospel of grace.

Do we who call ourselves by his name realize this? Have we yet grasped that we cannot claim his grace if we are not prepared to give his grace to others? The question then is, *how* are we to do that? How can we take up Jesus' ministry, live as he lived and love as he loved?

5. Jesus entrusted them with his life (20:22&23).

So finally, Jesus gave us what we needed to carry on his ministry: he gave us his own life, his Spirit to live within us, convicting us, comforting us, empowering us, enabling us to put to death the old life and take up the new life, the life of the risen, glorified Christ now living in us. Just as in the beginning of creation, God breathed the breath of life into humanity, so here in the new creation, Jesus breathes new life into a renewed humanity, his new people. And he does the same today to those who are his, to those whom he is bringing from death to life in the power of his Easter victory.

Conclusion

What of you this Easter morning? Have you yet met the risen Christ? Are you seeking him, longing to know him, willing to receive him if he comes to you? Have you heard him speak peace to your troubled heart? Have you gazed in wonder at his wounds and realized it was our sin – yours and mine – that caused those scars? Have you yet realized that he has entrusted to you the most important, the only eternally important, mission: that of seeking God's lost children and showing them the way home? Have you received the Holy Spirit of God, so that Christ now lives in you? This is what Easter is all about. It is the day that all things begin to become new. Once Christ has come to you, nothing is ever the same: "Old things passed away, behold all things have become new!" Here is the secret of joy and power in the face of whatever life may bring. So we join the apostle Paul in asking,

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ... For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31&32, 38&39).

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