

Intro - Open to John 20:19-23

If you read a good series of books, each one leaves you with a cliff hanger to rope you back into the next book. You will probably find at the end of book 2 that some things are answered but the last book in the series will hopefully wrap things up. I just finished a book two, so obviously it is fresh.

Last week we left on a bit of a cliff hangar with Mary running off to tell the disciples that the Lord is risen. Would they believe her? Where does Jesus show up next? How long will Jesus be with them?

I am here today to not resolve everything and even wait until next week for Part 2 of Tragedy to Triumph. But this morning, we look at how the disciples responded to Mary and then respond to the resurrected Christ appearing to them. It will resolve a few questions but it will give us even more hints of what Jesus' ministry will look like in the age of the church.

The transition between Jesus' ministry on earth and his intercessory ministry in heaven means that his disciples will be called into a new phase of their ministry. Jesus' death and resurrection is the lynch pin. His substitutionary death is the saving act, without which, death would continue its reign. Without his resurrection, we would have no hope that death is put to death. When those who fear God believe the truth of Jesus' death and resurrection it brings with it a transforming joy, mission and authority in his church.

Let us see that **the resurrected Christ brings triumphant joy, mission and authority to the church.**

Pray

One – Joy

Read John 20:19-20

We have gone from the scene at the tomb with Mary and Jesus to the evening of Easter Sunday. The disciples are gathered behind locked doors for their Sunday evening service because they very rightly fear that after Jesus was killed, they could be next. They are fearful that Jewish temple police might come to arrest them.

It does not appear that Mary's message, **"I have seen the Lord"** has made a change in the disciples. But all this is the setting for Jesus' appearance.

We notice that Jesus doesn't come in through the locked door but he simply appears among them. Jesus appears and like many angelic appearances would surely frighten any of us. So he appears and says **"Peace be with you."** The Hebrew word for peace, Shalom, is a common Jewish hello and goodbye and Jesus transforms the common into the divine. He accompanies his offer of eternal peace as a balance to their fear and immediately offers for them to see his hands and his side.

Every crucifixion victim would have his wrists punctured by nails but Jesus is unique to have his wound in his side. Both adorn the crucified and now resurrected king as proof of who he is. In Luke's gospel he adds an additional element to prove his physicality by eating fish with them.

Can you imagine the relief? Huddled together, stuck in the city, unsure if you would last another day and then Jesus shows up. He proves it is him, not with a series of answers of his identity but an unquestionable proof in his resurrected flesh still pierced.

What does this do to the disciples? They were **glad** the ESV says. It means to rejoice, to have the feeling of joy. It transforms their fear into joy. The root of this word in the Greek is Grace. When they see Jesus, their resurrected savior. Vindicated from the grave. Overcoming sin and death. A gift to them that is undeserved. It is an experience of the grace of God.

For us today, to experience God's grace starts from a place of humility and underserving. A place of fear. We do not deserve a resurrection. We do not deserve to be saved by God's grace. We do not deserve it at all. Yet that is crucial to the deep sweetness of grace. The fact that it is undeserved produces a thankfulness and a joy that pervades and perseveres and goes beyond the mere circumstances.

It is a comfort to know that all is not lost when Jesus went into the tomb. In the greatest reversal in history, all was gained at the cross and all was revealed at the resurrection. Their fear has turned to joy, a triumphant joy over death and sin and basking in God's grace.

Jesus goes now from comfort to purpose. He gives them a command and two previews of their mission together.

Two – Mission

Read John 20:21-22

Jesus' ministry has been preparing the disciples for his death. In his last week he taught them to endure and persevere. Now he tells them of their mission together for this next phase of ministry in two previews.

The first preview Jesus gives is that of the Great Commission. What John records here in verse 21, Jesus will say again in a fuller form in **Matthew 28:19-20**.

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

These are Jesus' last words before he is taken into heaven. **Go therefore and make disciples**. But this takes place 40 days from now. John is showing that Jesus had always intended to send out his disciples. It isn't a last-minute command; it is the purpose of Jesus from day one of his resurrection ministry.

A big emphasis throughout John's gospel has been Jesus' sent-ness. He is the "sent one" from the Father. Now this next phase of ministry will be sending his disciples.

The church today is still tasked with being the ones sent by God. This is why we send missionaries. This is why I hope week in and week out you, children and adults, will develop a love of God and a love for the gospel and His mission. That we might send a missionary from our midst. This is why we must train and study the Bible to equip us. We are sent ones, every one of us. Jesus has sent you. Sent you to your family, to your neighbors, to another local church like the Fishers, to the cities, and to the nations.

This should fill us with such joy that no matter what we fear or face, our task is clear. Jesus' resurrection means that the message is worth sharing.

The second mission preview flows from the first, and it is Pentecost. In verse 22, Jesus breathed on them. Now I debated going back through several options of how scholars have understood this verse but I decided you wouldn't want all that. The main difficulty is how Jesus' breathing on the disciples and his command to **"Receive the Holy Spirit"** are to be understood in relation to Pentecost in Acts 2.

In Acts, the Holy Spirit is poured out as a wind, like breath, and appears as a flame resting on the disciples. This empowers them to speak in foreign languages, to have all the power they need for the apostolic age and is symbolic of what every believer who comes to faith will receive. They receive the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them.

What we see here in John is not a mini-Pentecost but this is Jesus telling and physically breathing on the disciples as a physical parable, illustrating what will happen when he sends the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. I prefer this understanding because it simply does away with many difficulties but also because we have other examples of how Jesus did this type of preview with a physical parable or reminder.

Think back to John 13. Which was just a week earlier. Jesus had washed his disciple's feet. The disciples didn't understand what was going on. Why was Jesus physically washing their feet? Well... Jesus said in verse 7, **"What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."** His tangible parable was to be fully understood after the cross. You must let Jesus cleanse you of sin through the cross, through his blood shed, further symbolized through baptism.

Now here in chapter 20, Jesus breathes on them. This is another tangible parable for them to see what will come at Pentecost. He breathes on them and they are reminded that God breathed into the first man. He reminds them that God is their source of life. He reminds them that they must receive the Holy Spirit when it comes.

Both the great commission and Pentecost previews are preparing the disciples on day one for what will come later.

When the Holy Spirit does come, Jesus here connects it with his work of forgiveness. A ministry of forgiveness that carries with it an authority now given to the church.

Three – Authority

Read John 20:23

Now for our most puzzling statement this morning. What could it mean to **forgive the sins of any**? With my time in the text this week it is better rendered *“If you forgive the sins of any, they have been forgiven them”* Or to put it another way, if a disciple tells someone their sins are forgiven, it is because they see that they are in a state of forgiveness. It is a statement of fact about what has already taken place. I see that your sins are forgiven.

We know that we are not the ones to forgive sins because God is the only one who can forgive sins. **Daniel 9:9** *“To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness”* makes it clear that God and Jesus as God in the flesh is the only one who can forgive sins. Jesus does this in Mark 2, where he forgives the sins of the paralytic man lowered to him on a mat. The scribes are outraged and say *“Who can forgive sins but God alone?”* Jesus says, *“that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”* – he said to the paralytic – *“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.”* Immediately he was healed. These passages and more give us confidence that God is the only one who can forgive sins.

I think we need to take a moment and talk about what forgiveness with God is before we get to the application. Sins are the rebellious acts against a holy God. It is the overflow of our nature as rebellious humans to sin against God. No one is exempt, **Romans 3:23**, *for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*. These sins rack up a debt to God. **Romans 6:23**, *for the wages of sin is death*.

Think about it this way: If you lied to your friend the friend may forgive and move on. As you continue lying it's easy to see how the debt of your sin racks up. How many times will they forgive? How many more times can you lie until your words mean nothing? We understand that this type of behavior ends friendships. The result is a dead relationship where you cannot recover.

It is not hard to understand that physical and spiritual death is deserved when you consider the sins we commit against God. To sin against your friend is one thing. They are finite, limited and fallible themselves. They have probably lied to you! God, is infinitely valuable and powerful and perfect in every way.

You sin isn't just breaking an egg in the kitchen. You took a Faberge egg, those Russian fancy jeweled eggs, and smash it with each sin because you sin against an infinitely valuable God.

When Jesus went to the cross to pay the debt for your sins, so that God might forgive your sins, he wiped away the sins of the elect. All those who put their trust in him as the sacrifice for their sins are forgiven.

Now that we understand forgiveness, What does Jesus tell us to do here? The disciples don't forgive sins, they recognize when a sinner has been forgiven through receiving the gospel message and see the fruits of repentance. We have the Holy Spirit empowered ability to proclaim the truth of salvation. Those who repent and ask forgiveness of God. This is the principle taught by Jesus in **Matthew 16:19** after Peter gives his great profession that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus says, *“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.”* The principle is then expanded to the church in **Matthew 18:15-18**

¹⁵ *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”* ¹⁶ *But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.”* ¹⁷ *If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”* ¹⁸ *Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

This is our process of church discipline. It is not just Peter who has the keys of the kingdom. That is what Roman Catholics believe that the Pope does. Here in Matthew 18 and again in our text this morning, it is the church, the gathering of believers, that looks at sin in his brother within the church and say, we must address it.

We must treat sin as sin, and work within our proper authority as a church to say *“Based on the scripture, this man is in sin and therefore has not been forgiven because he has not repented.”* Church discipline is the slow and steady process of confronting sin in our brother until they repent or they are told that their sins are not forgiven and say that their faith is compromised by their unrepentant sin. They are then cast out, in excommunication because we can no longer say that their faith is genuine. That they are abiding in Christ. That they are forgiven.

The positive side is what we long to say instead “Based on scripture, this woman has repented of her sins, put her faith in Christ and we recognize that she has been forgiven so we should baptize her and welcome her into our fellowship.” We are not given, as the church, the authority to cleanse of sin. We are given a derivative authority to declare where forgiveness is true and untrue based on the biblical standard.

Conclusion

This mission given to the disciples is between part one and two of Jesus revealing himself to Mary and Thomas. Mary, devastated by Jesus’ death and empty tomb, hears her name and is sent on mission to give testimony of the risen Christ. Thomas was absent from this gathering. Next week we will discuss how blessed Thomas is to see the risen Christ and how his testimony of the risen Christ blesses us.

Here we are between two great professions of faith. A group of disciples filled with a joy, given a mission and an authority as the church by a resurrected Christ who just appears in their midst. This is our mission.

The resurrected Christ brings triumphant joy, mission and authority to the church.

If you are a believer in this resurrected Christ, he has revealed himself to you too. He has sent his Holy Spirit to regenerate your heart, gave you spiritual eyes to see the depth of your sin, the beauty of Christ, and now you have asked for the forgiveness from God offered through Christ. What has that produced? Do you have a joy and gladness? Are you on the mission as a sent-one? Are you exercising the authority in gospel proclamation to declare forgiveness and unforgiveness?

This is what we do as the church! We live in the mission. Christ is risen and this means we have no fear of death, no fear of man, no fear of failure. So how can we not have joy in this mission with an authority given by Christ?

The triumph of the resurrection is not just a message that we receive. It is a mission we live out.

The Triumphant Mission of the Church

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Two – Mission

Read John 20:21-22

Matthew 28:19-20

John 13:7

Three – Authority

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Daniel 9:9

Mark 2:1-12

Romans 3:23

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