



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER — APRIL 8, 2018
ACTS 4:32 - 35; PSALM 133; 1 JOHN 1:1-2:2; JOHN 20:19-31

YOU ARE SENT

JOHN 20:19-31: *[When 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." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 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 retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, 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 the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, 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. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt 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 come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.]

I was at a meeting at a local nonprofit earlier in the week and they had a sign about their "Beloved Community" – a beautiful thing – and the staff person showing me around talked about how they got this phrasing from Dr. Martin Luther King. It was a fitting time to be there; this past Wednesday was the 50-

year anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King.

The Reverend Dr. King spoke of the "beloved community" time and again. He was a pastor and preacher. He knew the Gospel of John and the belovedness and community nature of the charge from Jesus and the formation of

early Christian community. Dr. King said, “Our goal is to create a beloved community – and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.” He said, “Our ultimate end must be the creation of the beloved community.”¹

Martin Luther King was a man who recognized that he was SENT.

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you!” With those three words – I send you – Jesus commissioned the disciples, all of us, to go out and not just tell the good news, but to deliver the good news, to act the good news, as he did.

Martin Luther King knew that he was sent, and he delivered, for people living under gross oppression – at the cost of his life. But his call for us to be a beloved community with changed souls and changed lives goes forward, and the work to end prejudice and inequality becomes more and more urgent. How can we aspire to beloved community without that work?

The nonprofit I was at this week is El Centro de la Raza. For over 40 years, El Centro de la Raza’s prime directive has been “Building Beloved Community for all Races.” They are not a religious organization, but that work is Gospel. That is today’s Gospel!

The Beloved Community is not some abstract in-the-sweet-by-and-by dream that we can sigh at as only aspirational. It is what Jesus sends us to further, to invite, to build, to BE, the kingdom of God where every single

person is recognized as, and feels the truth of being, the beloved!

We are sent, with the disciples, in today’s Gospel. He sent them into a world where being beloved was often hard to realize, where Empire and tribalism and racism and poverty and oppression without much hope for change were the order of the day. Sound familiar? You bet it does! And into this troubled world, Jesus came, and comes, sent by the Father, and tells us all, “as the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

This is a powerful charge. This is how Jesus has seen himself and his own mission: in the Gospel of John, Jesus refers to God as “him who sent me” 38 times! He is clear about being here to do God’s work, and he charges us with the same.

I send you. That sounds daunting – but it is a *gift*.

Imagine those disciples locked away in that upper room. Despondent. Shocked. Do they wonder if Mary and the two disciples who claim to have seen Jesus have lost their minds? Are they afraid of a knock on the door that will bring accusation and violence to them? Are they lost in grief, feeling the profound absence of the one they love, the one they’ve been following?

And then he comes in. Jesus, whom they saw crucified, pierced, buried, comes into the roomful of cringing, lost people. It’s shocking! And Jesus doesn’t say, “Where were you, you cowards, and why didn’t you

believe the ones who saw me?” No. He says, “Peace.” But more than wishing them peace, he blesses them with his trust, sending *them* to continue his father’s mission. The most important sending possible. THEM. The very ones who hid away, and who haven’t believed. It’s not just Thomas whose faith needed proof. But Jesus sends THEM. And US. With Jesus’ resurrected life, we are *sent*.

We can talk about how hard this charge is, to lead this broken world into the knowledge and love of Christ and to Christ-like living. But instead, stop and think about what a gift it is, to be entrusted as the ones Jesus sends, despite our hiding, despite our sometimes-shaky faith. What faith in us that is! Us, with all our failings.

I often talk with people who worry that they are not okay with God. That they don’t pray enough, or that they’ve been away from church, or that they have doubts. I’m one of those people myself sometimes. But when Jesus comes in, he doesn’t say, “Where were you?” He doesn’t say, “How come you have doubts?” He says, “Peace. Touch me and don’t doubt any more; my Spirit is with you.” And he says, to them, to me, even when I am weak, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

The sending is the gift.

Think of your own life experiences. I imagine you have stories of being sent, or of needing to send someone in your stead, at a very important time. It’s a huge responsibility –

and a huge vote of confidence – and when we step up and go, and do, or someone does that for us, it is a deep connection.

When my daughter was a Sophomore in college across the country, and going through a hard time, we couldn’t get there for Parents Weekend. She said it was fine, and she wasn’t worried about it, but I knew it wasn’t fine, because I’m her Mom. And so I sent my two sisters-in-law, who lived back East, to go. And all weekend long, Kelsey just introduced them as her Moms, and the three of them had a ball together – and some deep conversation. It wasn’t just about the fun – although those two women know how to bring the fun – or even the good listening. It was about their carrying in full force the love of a mother to someone who needed it.

My sisters-in-law still talk about that weekend, ten years later. It was just as good for them as it was for Kelsey.

I know you know what that’s like, when someone asks you to step in, and step up. We are sent many times in our lives. It is an honor and a responsibility to be sent for someone, and sometimes it’s a pain in the neck or terrifying to be sent. But most of all, remember, and feel, how empowering it is to be sent!

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” How powerfully Jesus claims us as his own. He trusts us enough to send US.

That could be daunting, but Jesus doesn’t send us alone. In today’s Gospel, he breathes

his Spirit upon them: “Receive the Holy Spirit,” he says. Jesus will continue to be the resurrected presence in our lives, giving us what we need, the power and the solace and the driving force, to go forth where we are sent, to build the beloved community.

Think how the Spirit drove Dr. King, and how he moved mountains. They’re not all the way into the sea yet; carrying on that work is left to us all. But his vision of beloved community still changed the world.

In Dr. King’s words: “... the end is the creation of the beloved community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposers into friends. The type of love that I stress ... is agape which is understanding goodwill for all men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. This is the love that may well be the salvation of our civilization.”²

This is the love that transforms and empowers us to build the beloved community. It is okay if we feel more like Thomas in today’s Gospel sometimes. So did the other disciples, before they saw the risen Christ. And we are both the ones who have seen the risen Christ, and the ones who have not seen and still believe. And the ones who are scared and have some doubts sometimes. And Jesus still sends us to build the beloved community. WE are the ones sent.

If Jesus thinks we can do it, who are we to be afraid to go?

¹ King, Jr., Martin Luther (Coretta Scott King and James Melville Washington, eds.). *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1986, p. 58

² King, Jr., Martin Luther. “*The Role of the Church in Facing the Nation’s Chief Moral Dilemma*,” 1957. Accessed April 5, 2018 at <http://www.wearethebelovedcommunity.org/bcquotes.html>.



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