

Sermon: The Sending  
Text John 20:19-31

Rev Nancy J White  
Elijah Kellogg Congregaitonal Church  
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Today's scripture reading is the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to the disciples. This gospel reading is the assigned one each year for the Sunday after Easter. The story of 'doubting Thomas is one I have preached on more than a couple of times. This year, instead of focusing on Thomas and his need to see the wounds of the crucified and resurrected Christ, I'd like to explore the first part of this story.

This is the first day of the week – Mary has been to the tomb and has found two angels instead of Jesus' body. In grief and bewilderment, Mary wonders where the body of Jesus has been taken. Then she sees a man she perceives to be the gardener. When this man speaks her name, Mary recognizes him as Jesus and then she runs to tell the disciples that she has seen the Lord.

Even after hearing Mary's good news that Jesus is alive, the disciples are hiding behind locked doors in fear. The disciples are confused, scared and grieving hiding away from the authorities. Mary had told them that she had seen the Lord and either they did not believe Mary's account or they do not understand it. Regardless, they are hiding and Jesus suddenly appears in their midst greeting them with the conventional greeting, the familiar phrase 'Peace be with you.' But it is not until Jesus shows them his wounds on his hands and side, that the disciples respond in joy – this is when they recognize Jesus and perhaps for the first time fully understand Mary's words from earlier that day. Jesus then repeats, "Peace be with you" and they now fully understand that this is Jesus imparting God's peace to them. They are no longer alone – they do not need to fear the persecution of the authorities, they have something better, they have Jesus' peace. This doesn't mean life will be easy, but it does mean that whatever they encounter along the way will be met with in the 'peace of Christ'. What is the 'peace of Christ'? It is difficult to understand but I think of it as a sense of assurance that we are not alone – it is a calm feeling in the face of adversity – it is knowing that god is with us every step of the way. This fulfills the promise Jesus made to the disciples when he explained to them the events that would take place during Holy week, his betrayal and crucifixion – he promised to always be with them and to give them his peace – not peace as the world knows it but peace coming straight from the heart of Jesus' life. Jesus' life modelled this peace, this sense of quiet confidence with which he kept on teaching and healing even when he was misunderstood and rejected. Jesus' intention here is to fortify them so that they have courage and strength for the days to come.

So Jesus arms them with his peace and then sends them just as the Father sent Jesus.

Jesus was sent to reveal God's nature to humanity Jesus was sent to save the lost. Jesus was sent to share God's love. Jesus was sent so that all might know God and live their lives according to God's love. Jesus was snet so that all might be saved and have eternal life.

So Jesus was sent by God the father and now he tells his disciples that just as the father sent him, so he sends them – so send I you. So the disciples are sent to continue what Jesus started - to reveal God's nature of love to all the world. To further equip them for this mission, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on them – Jesus breathes the very breath of God on the disciples so that they might be empowered for this mission.

So good, the disciples were to go out and tell everyone of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ. We heard more about how they did that in the reading from Acts this morning. They did this with enthusiasm and did not let anything deter them. So that was them, what does it have to do with us?

In John's gospel, the term disciples – they are never identified as the eleven (the twelve less Judas who betrayed Jesus) - represents the entire faith community in general, not just the apostles - not just the ones in leadership. So this is Jesus sending out the whole faith community to share God's love. Not just the ones who have been with him from the beginning and have heard all his teachings and have had many in-depth discussions with him. This includes those who just met him for the first time and are embracing God's love tentatively perhaps. It includes the whole faith community – it includes us.

Hear Jesus say to you this day – 'As the Father has sent me, so send I you.'

What does that mean for us? It means bearing witness to who God is as revealed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

We are really wonderful at sharing God's love with each other. And we do a wonderful job financially supporting a number of ministries outside our church.

Modelling God's love as revealed in Jesus is fairly easy with people we know and have a relationship with. It is more difficult to share God's love with people we don't know or don't really like. It can be really hard to model this love with people who don't like us or people who don't like our politics or our country. But we are called to do this. The Sunday school children are learning to share God's love with Sreyvin of Cambodia and the children of Afghanistan and Pakistan as well the children of Washington County here in Maine.

How can adults do more to share God's love with others? I know it can be difficult, frightening even - because we all fear ridicule and rejection. No one wants to be rejected – not even pastors – but we have Jesus to be our courage. Last fall the children made prayer cards for all the fisher people of Harpswell. We have delivered only a few. I gave a few to one of our own fishermen – we'll call him Rick m. He has told us that the posted card was met with 'what's THAT doing here?!' God bless him - he is undeterred and the card remains.

We have a wonderful card ministry to members of friends of our church family. We could extend this to those in need outside our church. We send cards to service people or their families or especially to the many wounded service people at the Walter Reed hospital. A simple card to say your sacrifice was not in vain or God loves you can mean a lot as you know.

We have a beautiful prayer shawl ministry. This be extended to nursing homes or local cancer treatment facilities and not just to patients but to the staff members as well. Those who make the shawls could teach others to make them as well.

We do a really fantastic job with public suppers which are well received in the community and beyond. We host a supper to honor our local fire and rescue and other volunteers in our community.

We have some wonderful woodworking talent here at EKC. This could be extended to making doves of peace to be given to staff and patients at the hospital /nursing home or they could be included in the cards we send out.

I was at A festival in Bath last year with my six year old nieces and there was a church there who had one of those bouncy rooms – a piece of candy for each child – water to drink – it was a respite – an oasis among all the many sights and sounds of the day. Only kids could go in the bouncy room so parents stood around enjoying the glee of the children. All this was free and freely given - big fun, no big sales pitch – all the helpers advertized the church wearing identical tshirts - there were informational brochures and people available to answer questions about the church but only if they were approached – it was very well received. We could do something similar at the Harpswell festival.

God's Word offers us both comfort and challenge this morning. Comfort in the gift of the peace of Christ and challenge in the sending out to do as Jesus has done.

Church was never meant to a comfy place on Sunday morning but a place to be made ready to be sent out.

Jesus breathes the power of the Holy Spirit on the disciples and on us – we are sent with God's power – we do not go alone – this is God's mission, not our own.

As individuals and as a church God is sending us out to share the love of Christ – what a wondrous gift, Let's share it! Amen