

“...So I Send You.”

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher
Rocky River Presbyterian Church, Rocky River, Ohio
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- John 20:19-29²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.”²² Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”
- Psalm 16:5-11⁷ I praise the LORD, because he guides me, and in the night my conscience warns me.⁸ I am always aware of the LORD's presence; he is near, and nothing can shake me.
- Theme: Even more important than coming to church to praise Jesus is going back out into the world to serve Jesus.

And you thought Easter was over...!

In the New Testament we are told that for a period of forty days after being raised from the grave, Jesus appeared numerous times, first to the women, then to the disciples, and then (according to St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15) Jesus appeared to more than 500 believers. Some of those so-called “post-resurrection appearances” are pretty familiar, such as when the Risen Christ appeared to two people walking out of Jerusalem on the road to Emmaus. Jesus also appeared to the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, cooking breakfast over a campfire. And then there’s the appearances described in today’s selection from the Gospel of John.

On the evening of the first Easter, the disciples were still in Jerusalem, hiding behind closed doors. They were on edge. Why? Because they wondered if religious authorities who had pursued Jesus to the point of his death would soon decide to come after those who had followed Jesus. There were only ten of the disciples in the room. Judas had taken his life, so overcome was he with remorse, disappointment and self-loathing. And Thomas also was not present that night. We don’t know why. But he missed it – he missed it when Jesus somehow materialized inside a locked room and conversed with his spiritual brothers, showing them that his body was still marked by the wounds in his hands and torso. Afterward, when Thomas did arrive and heard what they claimed to have experienced, Thomas was skeptical. Doubtful. He said, “I won’t believe it unless I see him, unless I touch the wounds from his crucifixion.”

Then a week later, Jesus came to the disciples again, only this time Thomas *was* there. Apparently Jesus knew of Thomas’ skepticism from the previous week because he said directly to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side.” John’s gospel doesn’t say whether Thomas actually touched Jesus; all we know is that for Thomas, “seeing was believing.” Jesus then said to the disciples, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”¹

Now, let’s go back to that first appearance, when the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples on Easter night. We can barely imagine how dumbfounded they would have been, not knowing what to say or do, not sure if they could believe their eyes or ears. Jesus sought to calm them by wishing peace upon them. Then he said this: “As the Father sent me, so I send you.”²

When our shared time of worship and fellowship ends, we are sent out. I don’t mean “sent out” simply to go home or to go to lunch. Jesus sends us out to show God’s love to a contentious and fearful world. Jesus sends us into a world that basically doesn’t know him.

- For the most part, the world doesn’t exhibit the kind of life he calls us to lead: a life characterized by mercy and acceptance and compassion and joy.
- The world doesn’t realize how Christ’s obedience has freed us from a debilitating fear of death.

¹ John 20:29b New Revised Standard Version

² John 20:21b Good News Translation

- And even with all the money and energy that's poured into celebrating Christmas and Easter, an awful lot of the world doesn't know that those holidays – holy days – are a call to recognize and embrace Jesus as Friend, Master, Savior.

But as the Father sent Jesus, so he sends us. Jesus sends us out to present the world with the opportunity to discover God at work in their lives.

- Like a wagon train would send out a scout to look for the most promising and safest route to take...
- like a military unit sends out a reconnaissance team to see what resistance they should expect...
- like an entertainer sends out an opening act to warm up the crowd...

that is what Jesus asks us to do. Jesus sends us out

- to bring calm to an anxious world,
- to bring peace to a turbulent world,
- to bring healing to a scarred and injured world,
- to bring joy to a despairing world,
- to bring commonality to a fractured world,
- to bring thoughtfulness to a world content with what's expedient,
- to bring hope to a world overcome by despair.

Although one of my ancestors was a wagon train leader, I have no more experience with early American transportation than do any of you. But I heard of a pastor who used the passenger classification of the early American stagecoach operation to help his congregation begin to grasp what it means to be "sent out" into the world by Jesus. He explained to them that

...In those rough and romantic days [of stagecoach travel], in case of accident or a breakdown, first-class passengers could remain in place. Those occupying second-class space were expected to leave the coach, but not to work. Third-class travelers were not only expected to leave the stage, but also to help with repairs, or to lift the vehicle out of the mire and mud.

Following the sermon, [that] church sings a hymn of consecration and invitation, which offers an opportunity for anyone to identify with Christ and the church. On this Sunday morning, a family of five walked down the aisle. The man said to [the] pastor, "We would like five third-class tickets."³

That family understood that it's not enough to journey with Jesus. You have to be ready to roll up your sleeves and continue what he started.

Jesus sends you out. Even if you're not confident that you're qualified or experienced enough to represent the way of Jesus to the world, that's not what matters. What matters is that God is making you able, for as Ephesians 3:20 promises, it is God "...by the power at work within us [who] is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine..."⁴ That's affirmed in Philippians Chapter 2 where Paul wrote "...for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure."⁵

It was wonderful that at this church as all around the world, on Easter Sunday many, many felt brought together to worship God. But the work of the church did not end because we somehow made it to Easter. No, it's because of what God accomplished through Jesus at Easter that the work of the church – our work – is now ready to begin, for as the Heavenly Father sent Jesus into the world, so he sends us.

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³ G. Curtis Jones & Paul H. Jones, *500 Illustrations – stories from life for preaching and teaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998, 57

⁴ Ephesians 3:20 New Revised Standard Version

⁵ Philippians 2:13 New Revised Standard Version