

I.N.I.

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 7, 2017
John 20:19-23

In Christ Jesus, whose Resurrection back to life assures us of **REAL PEACE**, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last Sunday's sermon text ended with these words, **THE LORD IS RISEN INDEED, AND HAS APPEARED TO SIMON**. The two Emmaus disciples heard those words as they rushed into the room where the other disciples were. They then told these disciples what had happened to them--how Jesus walked and talked with them on the road, and how they then knew Him when He broke bread with them in their home.

Remember how these two men with hearts on fire went back that very evening to Jerusalem to bring this good news to the others. Well, while they were talking of these things suddenly, there in the midst of them, stood Jesus. The message that He brought to them on that Sunday evening would change their lives forever. We pray that it has the same effect on us today. The message Jesus brought to them was this. **“God the Father has sent Me into the world, now I am sending you, sending you to be My ambassadors, My representatives, My witnesses.”**

What a fearful, exciting night it must have been, that first Easter evening. We heard last Sunday that the news of the empty tomb had spread throughout the ranks of the disciples. The women said they had seen Jesus alive! Mary Magdalene talked to Him personally and gave them a message from the Lord. Peter saw Him, and now late in the afternoon these two disciples from Emmaus also said they talked with the risen Lord. Yet the whole company of disciples had not yet seen Him.

With fear and apprehension, confusion and excitement the disciples gathered together that evening behind closed doors. Suddenly without the opening of the doors, there in their midst stood Jesus. The reports were true; He is **RISEN!** He is **ALIVE!** Yet there was still doubt. We read in Luke's Gospel, **THEY WERE TERRIFIED AND FRIGHTENED, AND SUPPOSED THAT THEY HAD SEEN A SPIRIT.**

PEACE BE WITH YOU! What comforting words from that familiar voice. It was the Shepherd calling out to His frightened sheep, calming their fears. It was the Prince of Peace bestowing the gift of **PEACE** upon these fear filled, terrified followers. Jesus gave them even further proof of His person. He showed them the tell-tale marks---the nail prints in His hands and the spear mark in His side. These wounds were clear evidence that this was the same Jesus who had been crucified on Friday. The nail marks and the spear mark evidence of His saving work for mankind, now a part of His exultation. It was the same body, only glorified. A body not held in by walls or doors; not confined to space or time, no longer a servant to the things of this earth--eating, drinking, sleeping, getting sick or dying.

With overjoyed hearts the disciples welcomed the risen Lord. The **EASTER MESSAGE OF PEACE** was again repeated by our Lord and then He gave them their great calling:

AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, I ALSO SEND YOU!

In a short time Jesus would be departing from this earth with His visible presence. He had fulfilled His Father's plan of salvation, the redemption of mankind. Soon He would return to His heavenly Glory to rule over ALL things for the welfare of His Church---all believers in Christ!

But what about the rest of the world? What about those millions upon millions of people hundreds even thousands of miles away? How could they know about this **PEACE**? How could they possess this **PEACE** in their hearts? What about those yet to be born? How would the future generations know that there is **REAL PEACE** in this world of hostility and hatred, terrorism and tumult; murder and mayhem; **PEACE** between God and man? The angels announced this **PEACE** at Jesus' birth when they declared, **GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN!** But the Lord was not going to use angels to spread the Good News of **PEACE** to the rest of the world for the rest of time. He would use people, His people. That is why Jesus appointed these followers of His to be His ambassadors, His spokesmen, His witnesses, to tell others the very same thing Jesus told them, **PEACE BE WITH YOU.**

Jesus had spoken these same words earlier to Peter when He said, **AND I WILL GIVE YOU THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, AND WHATEVER YOU BIND ON EARTH WILL BE BOUND IN HEAVEN, AND WHATEVER YOU LOOSE ON EARTH WILL BE LOOSED IN HEAVEN.** Now these words are spoken to all of the disciples. But are they the only ones who are called to do this? **NO!** This use of the keys to bind or retain sins and to loose or forgive sins has been given by Jesus to all of His brothers and sisters, to all believers.

We call this the **MINISTRY OF THE KEYS.** We are all ministers/servants---all of us have been called to serve. Jesus says to all of us His slaves,

I AM SENDING YOU!

Maybe not as a pastor or parochial day school teacher or as a Sunday School teacher, but I am sending you as you are, wherever you are, into this world:

I: WITH THE EASTER MESSAGE OF PEACE!

Before we go out as individual servants, ministers for Christ we need to be equipped. Jesus equips us first of all with the message. You see our calling is a whole lot easier than those ambassadors who are called to try to bring about peace in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Israel and in the countless other places where there are skirmishes and wars. We're not called to set up homeland security measures and root out terrorists. We are being sent out into the world simply to **DECLARE** that there is **PEACE. PEACE has already been made.**

If our calling in our ministry to others was to bring about peace, to make peace between God and man with our own efforts, tactics, plans, or persuasive words we would all certainly fail. But **PEACE** has already been secured. **PEACE** has already been earned for us by Christ. That is the message we are to speak.

The **PEACE** of Easter is the message of man's reconciliation with God. Ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, by disobeying God, man was not at peace, or at one with God. Adam said this to God after he sinned: **"I HEARD YOUR VOICE IN THE GARDEN, AND I WAS AFRAID."** There no longer was that perfect relationship, that perfect harmony between the holy, sinless, perfect God and His holy, sinless perfect creatures. Now sin in all of its ugliness, terror, condemnation, guilt and despair stood between man and His God. There was a wall of separation. There could be no peace.

Man was doomed! There was and is no way that man could remove that wall, that barrier of sin that separated him from God. Only a perfect sinless substitute could do it. And One did. Christ! He as true man, just like you and I, yet without sin, took our place. He stood where we should have stood--before God's justice! He bore what we should have born--all of our sins. He suffered what we should have suffered--the eternal torments of God's wrath and damnation for the guilt of sin. And He rose so that we too shall someday rise again.

In so doing, all of our sins have been cancelled, paid in full, done away with, removed, washed, cast into the depths of the sea. Since there is no more sin, there is no more separation. God and man are at one. Our sins are laid on Christ, and Christ's perfect righteousness is now ours through faith. **GOD WAS IN CHRIST RECONCILING THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF.** That's the Easter message of **PEACE!**

That is what we have been sent out to proclaim. But how can we? You who have not been trained in sermon preparation and delivery, or in public speaking? How can we who have our own sinful, lazy flesh go out and proclaim the Good News of **PEACE?**

II: WITH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We can do it and we do, do it, only by means of the Holy Spirit working through the Word. The disciples were not only called and commissioned but they were also inducted into their callings, individually by the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts. It happened on that Easter Sunday evening and it happened again in a very special, public way 50 days later on Pentecost. When we see the disciples on Pentecost they are completely changed people. No longer fearfully hiding behind closed doors but boldly proclaiming God's Good News of **PEACE** through Jesus. Our Savior has promised us the same induction into His ministry, into His service through the Holy Spirit. May the Spirit's blessings be a life-changing experience in us!

How long have we been fearfully hiding behind closed doors--the closed doors of excuses of not

knowing enough of the Bible to tell others, the closed doors of being too busy to speak to others about Jesus, the closed doors of being too shy and introverted, of being too afraid of what others might think about us? Perhaps we hide behind the closed door of "that's the pastor's job, not mine. I want to be a simple member who comes on Sunday, sings and prays for an hour, gives my offering and then goes home. I don't want to be bothered. My life is busy enough."

But bothered, our consciences will be. For Jesus says to every single one of us this morning, to every believing child of God; **AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, I ALSO SEND YOU:**

III: WITH THE AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE AND RETAIN SINS

I am sending you to forgive sins in My name. This is as we said earlier the Ministry of the Keys. Even as keys do two things, lock and unlock, so this ministry does two things. It unlocks the door to heaven and locks that door. When we announce the forgiveness of sins through Jesus we are figuratively unlocking the door of heaven. What a wonderful privilege, responsibility and power we have been given by Christ. To declare to someone that their sins have been remitted, done away with, canceled, removed alone through Jesus life, death and resurrection and that the door to heaven is now open. This we do publicly as a congregation through me, your called servant, but this we also do privately as we have the opportunity to speak and deal with others in this world. This action is as valid and certain in heaven as if Christ dealt with that person Himself.

But there is another use of the keys and that is to lock. This power and authority has also been given to believers. Even as we have been given the authority from Jesus to declare sins forgiven; so also we have been given the authority and responsibility to declare a person's sins retained, or as Jesus said when speaking to Peter, his sins are still bound to him, thereby figuratively closing the door to heaven.

This is done only to those who reject this Good News of **PEACE** alone through Christ. The door of heaven is locked to those who do not acknowledge with heart-felt sorrow their sins, to those who do not trust in Jesus as their Savior from sin, to those who continue to live in willful sin without repenting of it and changing their ways. To those who refuse this gift of forgiveness, it must be said and declared; **YOUR SINS ARE RETAINED; YOUR SINS ARE STILL BOUND TO YOU. THE DOOR TO HEAVEN IS LOCKED TO YOU BECAUSE OF YOUR HARD HEART; YOUR IMPENITENCE; YOUR REJECTION OF JESUS AND THIS GOSPEL MESSAGE.** This action is also as valid and certain in heaven as if Christ dealt with that person Himself.

This action is never done with joy or happiness, but it is done out of love, to lead the person to realize his/her sins and through the power of the Spirit be led to repentance, forgiveness and life in and through Jesus. A Christian's desire is ever that of our Savior, who said through Peter that **HE IS NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH BUT THAT ALL SHOULD COME TO REPENTANCE.**

Do you see your risen Savior standing beside you? Do you feel His hand on your shoulder? Do you hear Him say to you, "**AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, I ALSO SEND YOU?**" You have been inducted into your office of the ministry of Christ, willing servants for Jesus by the Holy Spirit who has brought you to faith in Jesus through the Gospel. You have been equipped with the Easter message of **PEACE**; and with the power of the Holy Spirit you are called to go out and to exercise this authority you have to forgive sins in Jesus' name.

May God change our lives, open our doors and grant to all who are here this morning the desire to faithfully perform this ministry of declaring forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name to all whom we meet. Jesus has work for you and me to do. We do not only have this **PEACE** to hold in our hearts, but we have it to hand it on to others who need it as much as we do. Amen.