

Green Hill Presbyterian Church
“I Am Sending You”
Thomas G. Speers, III
Easter 2--April 28, 2019

Lessons: John 20:19-31

The fact that you are here in church today deserves a certain recognition. This first Sunday after Easter is often referred to as “low Sunday” when there are fewer people in church and Easter outfits have been put away for another year; the candy has been eaten and the lilies that remain don’t look quite as good as they did last week and we return to normal. For me, in some ways, it feels like Easter took place about a month ago, although our orthodox sisters and brothers are celebrating Easter today. Every Sunday is a little Easter. We worship on Sunday, The Lord’s Day, not Saturday, because every Sunday remembers the resurrection.

Every year the gospel lesson for this second Sunday of Easter is the story of doubting Thomas. Thomas was the one who wanted proof. He was the one who wanted to see for himself before he decided whether or not it was true. He is the patron saint for all of us who have not seen and yet still believe. He has a great integrity because he is not willing to go along with the crowd until he is convinced for himself that it is the right thing to do. It is also a story that might be better used on Easter itself because it so pointedly shows that sometimes when you are away from the community of faith, as Thomas was, you really miss some extraordinary happenings. People who come to church only at Easter and Christmas are always welcome here. It is always great to see them but if that is the only time you get to church, you’re going to miss some extraordinary happenings. But today, this year, rather than focusing on Thomas, I want instead to focus on the commission that Jesus gave the disciples on his first appearance in the Upper Room, when Thomas wasn’t there.

Early on Easter the women went to the tomb, as did Peter and John, and there they encountered the empty tomb. There they believed. Mary encountered the risen Christ himself who called her by name and she told the disciples about that experience. Yet, even with those encounters, the disciples still were hidden away, behind locked doors in their Upper Room, afraid that the authorities were going to come after them as they had gone after Jesus. Yet, locked doors could not keep the risen Christ away. Jesus came and stood among them and said: “Peace be with you.” He showed them his hands and his side, so that they would know that it really was him, their wounded and now risen Lord. The wounds are a reminder that he understands our woundedness. And again he said, “Peace be with you.” In some ways those are the first words spoken to the church: “Peace be with you.” In a fearful world where you are afraid, where it feels as if others are out to get you, in a world where innocent people suffer, in a world where sometimes you can be betrayed by one of your closest friends, “peace be with you.” In a world that is full of way too much violence, Jesus says: “Peace be with you.” Those are his first words and they are important enough that he says them twice. Peace be with you. Jesus wants us to know God’s peace in our fearful, painful, scary and violent world. Peace be with you. Serene Jones writes, “In the different seasons of our life, Jesus’ appearance is certain to change, and we will not always know him, particularly when hardships have given us many reasons to doubt. One moment he may come to us dressed in golden garb, calling us to celebrate joyously the richness of spirit faith promises. The next, however, he may come wearing beggar’s rags, reminding us that the love which saves is vulnerable and costly, and that the glory which awaits us is humble in texture and well worn in feel. At still other times, he may come to us wrapped in the wool shawl of the wise old grandmother who simply holds us as we weep. Whatever his appearance may be, though, we will know it is he if inside those golden garbs, street-faded rags, or warm knitted cape, we find not a logically argued response to our questioning faith but a surprising proclamation of peace

and touching love that is stronger than even violent death itself.”¹ Peace be with you.

Jesus doesn't stop there. We are never left simply with the “warm fuzzy” of peace. Jesus gives those disciples, and with them all disciples coming down through the generations to us, a commission. “As the Father sent me, so I send you.” It is never enough simply to gather in the safety and security of worship. It is never enough only to develop our vertical relationship with God; we need also the horizontal relationships with each other. We are sent out in the same way that Jesus was sent out. He went out to the poor, to the sick, to the unclean, to the ostracized, to women, to lepers, to Samaritans, to Gentiles, as well as to the religious folk of his day and he shared God's peace with them. We are called to do the same. It is good and wonderful that you are here today on this “low Sunday” and you are to be commended for that. But if your discipleship goes no further than being present in worship on Sunday morning then you've failed to heed the call of Jesus who said: “As the Father sent me, so I send you.” Today really is a day for re-commitment. How might we be about the work of Jesus in the world today? How might we feed the hungry and clothe the naked? How might we bring good news to the poor and the poor in spirit? How might we love the loveless and help the suffering? That is our calling, to get out from behind these doors where we know the security of being together, to live the gospel in the world today. For it is not simply those who only make it to church on Easter and Christmas who need a new dedication, so do we. So are we called to deepen our commitment, to enrich our discipleship that we might share the peace we have received from God.

Ann Weems says it this way: “Our hot cross buns are cold, and we've eaten the Easter candy, but there is still time for tenderheartedness. There's still time for compassion. There's still time for us to be about the business of freeing the slaves. ‘Return to me,’ says God the Poet. ‘Return to me.’ There's still time for us to turn and hand our hearts to the widows, the orphans, and the strangers among us. There's still time to share our stars with those who have no stars. There's still time to sit down to life with our neighbors and share our bread and our wine. Even now the thank-yous can rise from our hearts, and we will no longer be concerned with counting our number, for he is Lord of all, and our number is still greater than all the stars in the sky...”

“Our mouths will sing what our hearts are full of: Hosanna and Thank You, and we will remember...remember...remember... to love one another. We will remember the song of the angels: Peace on earth, goodwill to all...to all...to all... We will live the promise of the presence of God when every knee...every knee!...every knee shall bow at the name of Jesus...If we return, God will run out to meet us, arms open to welcome us Home!”²

There is still time even for the likes of us. Jesus pronounces peace upon us all, and then sends us out into the world in the same way that God sent him, to share that peace far and wide and in so doing find ourselves welcomed home. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. There is still time.

Let us pray: Faithful God, challenge us to be more faithful disciples, serving you after the example of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

¹ Serene Jones, *Theological Perspective*, John 20:19-31 in *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide*. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. © 2008 Westminster John Knox Press.

² Ann B. Weems, *The Hosanna Woman and the Thank-You Man*, in *Putting the Amazing Back in Grace*, Westminster John Knox Press © 1999.