



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

April 15, 2007

2nd Sunday After Easter

John 20:19-23

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Acts 5:12, 17-32

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 16

Second Lesson: Revelation 1:4-18

Gospel: John 20:19-31

I Am Sending You

When I was growing up, my father got a lot of jobs on the side that he would do in the evenings or on the weekends. He would do plumbing for someone. He would do electrical work for someone. He had some rental property and we would go and work on that. As a kid, it was pretty cool to go work with your dad and be working with him. That was kind of fun. The only problem was that I was about at that age where about all I was good for was to go get the flashlight and hold it still or go get a screwdriver, go get a wrench, or go do this, go do that. You know, not really doing any of the stuff that was going on. So you would start the day out and it would be really cool to be with your dad, but then he would say, "Here, hold this flashlight" as he was lying under the sink. Pretty soon you would notice a bug crawling across the floor and that was fascinating, and the flashlight would be going everywhere except where it was supposed to be. Or he would say, "Go get me a screwdriver" and I wouldn't hear it because there was a crack in the floor that was fascinating or something like that as a little kid. So then my dad would send me to go get something else for him again, only this time a little more forcefully with a little more motivation as his voice got a little bit louder and louder. Then I would know it was time that I better get up and go do what he said and hope I actually heard what I was supposed to go get as I was going to the tool box. It started out, of course, fun that he had sent me, but I got distracted because I was just a little kid. I needed to be motivated at times by fear of my dad's loud voice.

I find it fascinating that as we see Jesus on Easter evening, he sends the disciples and he sends us. I find it even more fascinating that he doesn't motivate us with a voice that gets louder and more threatening. When he sends us, he sends us in peace. We who don't deserve that peace, we who are recipients of his amazing grace, he says, "Peace be with you," and he sends us. But then he doesn't just send us with that peace. He also sends us with a power that is the most powerful thing in this world. He has entrusted it to you and to me. That ought to amaze and thrill us also as we consider what he said on that first Easter evening.

Think of the scene that first Easter evening. Put yourself in the sandals of one of the apostles, one of the disciples that are there in that upper room. You are behind locked doors. Why? Because you are afraid of the Jews; you are afraid that the mob that arrested Jesus might now come looking for you and take you off and be a real problem for your lifestyle. As you are there in the locked room, because you are afraid, you are also discussing all of these reports you already heard this morning. The women had gone real early in the morning, and they didn't find Jesus. They come back and start talking about how someone stole his body. They come and say they have seen him. A

couple of them run out to the grave site and stick their head in the tomb, look in there and see it. One wasn't quite sure what was going on. The other believed. Then there are two of you that had walked to Emmaus and got met by someone you didn't recognize and all of a sudden, when he broke bread, you realized that it was Jesus and how your hearts were burning because he had opened Scriptures to you. So you are there altogether discussing this. You have heard these incredible reports.

Then all of a sudden, without a knock on the door, without a key rattling in the door, without anything being unlatched, there is Jesus standing among you. Someone got in the room without unlocking the door that was locked. That itself would be amazing. But here is the one that you had seen crucified. Here is the one that you knew was buried in a tomb, sealed, and guarded, and now he is standing there with you.

We are told the disciples were overjoyed. I think some of that joy came from Jesus' greeting, "Peace be with you"—"Sholom Aleichem" in the Hebrew language. It was a common greeting. It was how they said "Hello," but I think here he is saying more than just "Hi, how is it going" because he repeats it. "Peace be with you," a second time he says it to them. Now I think that had to thrill them that Jesus greeted them with peace. Think about it. Three days earlier, what had they done? When Jesus said "watch and pray," they heard "sit and sleep." When Jesus told them to put the sword away, they heard "run away." When he was on trial and being taken to that trial, he was being denied by the one who said, "These jokers will all deny you or will all betray you, but I never will."

Can you imagine the feeling in that room when Jesus comes and says, "Peace be with you." They didn't deserve that peace. They didn't earn that peace. They had deserted their closest friend. Yet, Jesus comes and says, "Peace be with you." He assures them that there is peace between them and him, between them and God, even though they hadn't earned or deserved it. He had lived perfectly in their place. He had died in their place and even though they had turned their backs on him, he didn't turn his back on them or on the world. Their sins are forgiven. He greets them in peace and says, "Now I am sending you." So firmly and so fully has this peace been reestablished between them and God that he says, "I am sending you. I have a job for you. It is an important job. It's not a flashlight. It's not a screwdriver. It has to do with repentance and forgiveness of sins. It has to do with other people knowing that there is peace between them and God because of what I have done."

It is an amazing thing that our God entrusts sinners like them and sinners like you and me with this important task of being sent to be his voice. That is what our God does. We might say, "I'm not qualified." We might throw up excuses just like Moses. "What shall I say your name is? I don't talk so good. I can't go back there to Egypt." All the other excuses Moses threw out. We at times are tempted to throw out excuses. "I haven't been trained all that well. I get nervous when I talk to people." We have all the excuses and we have all the reasons why we shouldn't carry out the task of being sent, but Jesus says, "Really, no you don't, because there is peace between you and me. Not only have I made peace and taken away all of your sins and not only have I made peace between you and God that knocks down your wall of excuses you would like to put up, I'll tell you what. I have also got power for you that is beyond your power,

beyond your eloquence, beyond your wisdom, beyond any of your abilities. I have a power that I am going to give to you that you can use when I send you out—a power that comes from the Holy Spirit.” We are told that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

These men were believers already, and in that sense, the Spirit lived in their hearts. But here is a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was given and a special entrusting of the Holy Spirit with this ministry of saying to people, “Your sins are forgiven. Your sins are not forgiven. I tell you, if you forgive anyone their sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

That makes good sense to us in English, but that is not exactly what he said. He said, “If you say to someone that their sins are sent away, they are sent away. If you say to someone that their sins are sticking to them, they are sticking to them.” Really we are announcing what Christ has done. That is our power. We are announcing what Christ has done, and what Christ has done, he has done for the whole world. He lived in the place of everyone. He died in the place of everyone. He has forgiven the sins of everyone. That becomes ours personally through faith. So, on the basis of a person’s relationship to God, on the basis of their relationship to believing that Jesus is their Savior who takes away their sins that they desperately need forgiven, we say to them, “Your sins are forgiven. They are sent away from you. As far as the east is from the west, God has forgiven them and remembers them no more.” That is the power we have to say to people. We can say this is as certain as if Jesus Christ says it to you himself because he has given us that power to speak. He has given us that message to share. That is what he sends us to do.

It is important to remember where that power comes from. It comes from God, and it is on the basis of what he has said. I can’t just stand here and say, “You know what? You irritated me last week. You’re not forgiven. Your sins are still sticking to you.” That’s not how it works. It’s how we work. It’s how you work at times. It’s how I work at times. That’s not how God works. His power is not based with us. It is based in what Jesus is and what he has done for us. I can’t say to someone I love who doesn’t have a right relationship with Christ, “Don’t worry. You are forgiven and heaven is open to you.” I have to do it on the basis of what God has said in Scripture. That is his power. That is what he has entrusted to us.

But now you and I, each and every one of us, have that ability to say to someone who is troubled by sin and says to us, “I know Jesus is my Savior, but I still feel the weight of my sin. I still feel as though I can’t stand before God because I know what I have done.” You and I have the power to say to them, “Christ lived in your place. Christ died in your place. He has sent away those sins. Don’t let Satan try to make them stick to you, because they don’t. God has sent them away.”

That is the power we have. It’s not just the pastor who has that power. I can stand and say, “As a called servant of the Word and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” But God has given you that command also. He has given you that privilege also.

If I was to be gone on a Sunday and we had a lay person lead the service, could they stand in the front of church and say, "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit"? Has God given them that right and that privilege? Yes. That is what he said here. We have the Ministry of the Keys entrusted to us. We have this incredibly powerful tool, the power, the dynamite of the gospel that blows people out of hell and into heaven when we say, "Your sins are forgiven through Christ." We also use it to lead back the straying to say, "Your sin sticks to you because you have turned away from God and you are no longer one with God. We want you to be one with God. Turn back to Christ so that you might find forgiveness."

That is the power that he has given to all of us. We have it. It is in our possession, but the question becomes, how good are we at using this power? Do we make it a practice to say, "I forgive you and so does God" to those who have wronged us? Or are we more comfortable with saying what the devil would probably love to hear us say? "Don't worry, that's alright." Do you find yourself ever saying that to someone when they come to you and apologize for something they have done wrong? They have sinned against you and they say, "I'm sorry. I was wrong." Do you ever find yourself uttering those words "don't worry, it's alright"?

You are probably trying to say "I forgive you," but what have you really said to that person? "Sin isn't a big deal. Don't worry about sin." Can we get better at using the Ministry of the Keys with each other to say "I forgive you because Christ has forgiven you" and tie Christ into that? I believe so. I believe we can all get better at that because here is the comfort we have. Here is what it is. Jesus rose from the dead. The grave didn't contain him. That assures us our sins have been paid for completely.

So when we talk about forgiveness, we are talking about going back to the empty tomb. We are talking about leading people to Christ where we see who he is and what he has done for us. We know that because he lives, we also shall live. The grave isn't the end for us. That is what we want to be able to say to people.

So get closer to God in Word and Sacrament, and then get better at carrying out the task he sent you to do—which is to use this Ministry of the Keys to forgive the sins of the penitent and to refuse forgiveness to those that do not repent, but to do it in love and to do it with a desire that people will be able to be with God and hear him say, "Peace be with you."