

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The deaf have a sign for Jesus Christ. They put their finger into the middle of the palms of each hand. The reference is very plain. When the Risen Savior wanted to show his disciples that it was really he, he showed them his hands and his side. He wanted to show them again that he was their Savior, who died on the cross to save them from their sins.

When he had showed them the marks of the Savior in his hands and side, he said, "**Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.**" These are the words, which we want to focus on this morning. Jesus came to be our Savior. Now he sends us out to do for others what he did for us.

AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, I AM SENDING YOU.

I. He sends us to tell people that their sins are forgiven

The disciples were hiding in a room with the doors locked for fear of the Jews. Jesus was their Savior. He was their hero, their champion, their leader. He had put all of their dreams in one basket – namely, in Jesus. If the Jews could do with Jesus what they did, what would happen to them? When would they come for them as well?

I can understand why they were afraid. If I didn't know that Jesus rose from the dead, I would be afraid, too. I would be afraid that my life didn't mean anything at all. I would be afraid that when I die, I would just turn into a pile of dust. People would remember me for a generation or maybe two. Then I would just be gone forever, nothing more than a name on someone's family tree.

And if I actually believed in God, or maybe god with a small "g", I would be really be afraid. What is God going to say to me when I step before his throne of judgment? How can I account for all the sins that I have committed in my life? How many times did I tell God that I would

quit drinking or quit swearing or quit hating – only to commit that same sin all over again? How could I ever give God a good enough reason for not sending me to hell forever?

Maybe that fear was on the minds of the disciples as well. They all swore to Jesus that they would not fall away that night in the garden. Peter even said he would die for Jesus, rather than fall away from Jesus. But when the soldiers took Jesus, the disciples ran like scared rabbits into the dark of the night. They let Jesus face the soldiers alone.

And they didn't show up later, either. Well, Peter did, but when he was confronted by a servant girl, he denied that he even knew Jesus. John did show up at the cross, and only John, but that was too little too late. They were afraid of the Jews and they were afraid of God because of their sins.

Suddenly, Jesus appeared with them in the room. Locked doors meant nothing to a risen Savior. And what did Jesus say, "Peace be with you." It was a familiar greeting – "shalom aleicha." It was a greeting that you gave to a friend. Coming from the mouth of Jesus, these words had special significance. "You are my friends. Don't think for a moment that your sins can come between us. I have forgiven your sins. See the marks of the wounds in my hands and my feet and my side? I left these in my flesh so that you would always remember that I died for your sins. Peace be with you!" And suddenly their fear was gone and their hearts were filled with joy instead.

Friends, we know that same joy the disciples knew. We don't have to be afraid of death because of our sins. When Stephen was stoned to death in the book of Acts, he looked up to heaven and said, "Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" Do you think when he looked into heaven he also saw Jesus' hands, the hands that were nailed to the cross? We don't have to be afraid. Jesus gives us this peace!

Then Jesus says something remarkable. **"Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."** With these words, Jesus sends his disciples out to do what God sent him to do for them. I believe these words are meant for all of Jesus' disciples, ourselves included. Jesus sends us out to save the world, just as God sent him to save the world.

How can we save the world? Let me give you an example. A man by the name of Edward Jenner saved millions of lives when he developed the vaccine which prevents small pox. That disease has almost been eradicated from the world. How? Thousands of doctors and nurses went into schools and hospitals and even to the most remote regions of the earth to deliver the vaccine. They didn't develop the vaccine, but each one of those people saved lives by delivering it. In the same way, Jesus sends you out to save lives by bringing to the people of this world this wonderful message of the gospel. **"If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven."**

And that message is so powerful. I had an elderly member once who was afflicted with a terrible case of depression. I thought it was because her husband died, but it was worse than that. She was so ill she required hospitalization in a mental institution. I visited her every week, sometimes twice a week for two months. At first we just talked. Then, she began to tell me little things about her life when she was a teenager. She was not an innocent teenager. In fact she was very promiscuous. When she told me the things she did, I told her that Jesus forgave her sins. Then, one day, she told me that when she was nineteen years old, she had an abortion. She wept and wept, and I told her that her sins were forgiven, all of them. A week later she was released from the hospital. Her depression left her. I think I saved her life. No, not me. Jesus did. But Jesus gave it to me to tell her these powerful words. "Your sins are forgiven."

Jesus gives you that same authority to forgive sins in his name. When your children come to you, ashamed because they did something sinful, you can tell them that their sins are forgiven. A friend may tell you that they feel guilty about something that they did. Don't let that opportunity pass by! Tell them, "Jesus died on the cross and rose again for you. Your sins are forgiven!" Or maybe someone will tell you they are afraid to die. Ask them what makes them afraid. Often they will say they aren't a very good person. Then tell them about Jesus. Tell them their sins are forgiven.

Is that too hard for you? No it is not. Jesus gives you the Holy Spirit the same way he gave his disciples the Holy Spirit. The words are not hard to say. "Jesus forgives all your sins." Jesus put you there and Jesus sends you out to forgive the sins of those who want to hear it! He also sends you out to chase away the doubts that people have in their hearts.

II. He sends us to take away the doubts people have

Thomas had some serious – really serious – doubts. He wasn't there when the disciples saw Jesus the first time. When the disciples told him the story, and you can imagine how excited they must have been, Thomas just wouldn't believe them. "Unless I see the wounds in his hand and side, I will not believe," he said.

A whole week went by and Thomas still would not believe the disciples. **A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"** Jesus doesn't march into the room and say, "Thomas, you're fired!" He doesn't come into the room and roll his eyes in disgust and say, "So how is our little doubting Thomas today?" Jesus blasts Thomas' doubts into a million pieces by showing him his wounds and inviting him to touch them. Remember what Thomas said? "Unless I touch them, I will not believe." Jesus bends over backwards to make a believer out of Thomas.

And Jesus has bent over backwards to patiently make believers out of each and every one of you. Do you remember any of the doubts that you had, or maybe still have? I do. I remember doubting when I was a teenager if Jesus was the one, the only, the real Savior out of all the people in the world. How can I be sure? I think Jesus led me to study for the ministry just so that I would have to study the Bible carefully. What convinced me was all the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. When I read Psalm 22 today and see how Jesus fulfilled that Psalm in his death and resurrection, it convinces me all over again.

How did Jesus convince you? Jesus says, **"Blessed are those who have NOT seen and yet have believed."** Then John ends with these words. **"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."** The Bible is just as convincing as seeing Jesus' alive with our very own eyes. Remember the story of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus? First he taught them from the Scriptures that Jesus had to rise again. Only when they were convinced from the Scriptures did Jesus allow them to see him.

And Jesus said, **"As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."** Jesus sends you to your family and your friends and wants you to make believers out of those who doubt. Has anyone ever asked you one of those doubting questions? How can I be sure that I will go to heaven someday? How can I be sure that there is a heaven? How can I be sure that God forgives all my sins? What will my body be like in the resurrection? These are people who are begging to have their doubts blasted into a million pieces.

God's word can do that. You can answer those questions from God's word. And if you don't feel you can do that, then bring that person to a Bible information class where your pastor will answer those questions from the Bible for both of you. Only don't let your friends hang there with doubts in their minds.

You are Jesus' salesforce, and you are the most convincing salespeople for Jesus there ever will be. You are a satisfied customer, if I can be so crude. Jesus has forgiven your sins! Who can better say with more understanding or compassion than you? "Your sins are forgiven." Jesus has chased away all your doubts. Who is better prepared to say, "See what the Bible says!" than you, whom God has convinced? **"As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."** Amen.