

Pastor T.C. Arnold
John 20:19-23
2nd Sunday of Easter
April 8th, 2018

A week ago today we celebrated the Resurrection of our Lord. Usually when Easter arrives we think of spring time. But the Lord played His own version of an April Fools' Day joke and our Easter this year and it turned out to be anything but a typical spring day.

Yet while spring is still trying to get its start... and we are longing for spring to get its start... we do well to remember that Easter is just getting its start as well. In other words, Easter is not behind us... much like the cold weather does not seem to be behind us. This is the second Sunday of Easter and not the 1st Sunday AFTER Easter. Easter is not a day, it's a time and it's a season. It goes on beyond today until the middle of May – And it doesn't stop there. It doesn't stop there because though we stop calling it Easter, the empty tomb still remains as that symbol of life that our Lord won and that we now have. That life is never taken away just when we stop calling our days “Easter.” That life is ours and Easter is always at the tip of our tongue whatever season it is.

And now today, as we continue and remain in Easter we look yet again into that empty tomb and see that He is not there. As we look in we don't see death we see life through the absence of death. We don't see our Savior. All we see is the burial cloth that He left behind. St. Matthew shows us that we see one of those angels sitting on top of the “rolled away” stone and the guards that were there were so scared, they fell to the ground and were like dead men. We don't see our Lord all we see is that angel telling us, “*He is not here; He is risen from the dead just like He said. Now, go and tell the disciples and tell Peter.*”

They see Him then they don't see Him anymore, and then they see Him again. This is exactly how we have it in the Gospel according to St. John. At the beginning of chapter twenty we are told of the empty tomb and then we are told of the appearing of Jesus. He appears to Mary Magdalene and then in the text He appears to His disciples in the upper room. And then He appears to Thomas to show him his hands and side and to tell him to stop doubting and believe. That's the way St. John tells it and that's what He did. They saw Him, then He was gone and then they saw Him again.

But seeing Him is not the end. It's the beginning. His appearing shows us what we have, that is life, and shows us what we have to give, that is the same life, to others. Here's why I love this text so much: You see, Jesus appears to His disciples (excluding Thomas and, of course, Judas) in that upper room but doesn't tell them to keep all that is standing there before them to themselves. He tells them to go, get out of there and take the Word with you. The Holy Spirit will be your guide. The Lord will show you the path. And most important are what is given by God to the Church – the keys that is the power to forgive and to retain sins. And He says, take this and go – “*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*”

It really is interesting to see how the Lord “sends” His people. He sends His people to the far reaches of this country and, of course, even to the far reaches of the world. The Lord sends – and that's how work is done, that is how His message is proclaimed and that is how the grace of God is heard and placed into the lives of His children. The Lord sends. “*He is not here, He has been raised from the dead just as He said – go tell His disciples.*” “*Go to the lost children of Israel and you go, preach the message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’*” “*Go, and make disciple of all nations baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*” You go – “*I am sending you.*” The Lord sends.

As I think back to that day in April of the year 1999 called – appropriately enough – “call day” when they called my name before the hundreds of people gathered at St. Timothy and Titus Chapel on the campus of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri I heard for the first time where the Lord would send me. I received a call to serve as a pastor – a divinely given Call to a naive young man from a refinery town in Southwestern, Illinois. Who was I to receive such a privilege? Who was I to be sent?

I heard missionaries ask this very same question this past summer while DOXOLOGY was in Latvia providing pastoral care to those serving in Europe in Asia. Some of their stories of faithful endurance in the midst

of persecution were absolutely amazing. Because of where they are located, some of these missionaries are not even listed on the synodical website so as to help them keep a low profile in places where their lives could be threatened. They would ask, who am I to be sent to do such important work for the Lord?

I will tell you who I am and who they are for all these things. We are called servants, made by God to be sent to His people. We are made by God to share those blessings because of nothing that pastors and missionaries deserve and for sure nothing that we have done. We are made and sent by what has been given.

And that's how God has made all of us. That's how God sends His people. A God that is dead cannot send. A God who is dead cannot have His Word and life persist over the years. A God who is dead cannot stand before those in the upper room and show them that He is alive while showing His hands and side. A God who is dead cannot breathe on them and give to the church the keys of forgiving and retaining sins. A God who is dead cannot stand before His disciples and say, "*I am sending you.*"

You see, this is how and why the Lord continues to send – because the tomb is empty and He is alive. This is why He continues to send – because the Lord's vineyard is bigger than Kansas City. The Lord sends because there is always more for the sake of His entire vineyard.

We seek the will of God through prayer and the Word. We ask that His will be opened up to us so that we might do what is best for the greater good of God's kingdom on earth. But, the hard part is, we don't always see that "will of the Lord" so clearly. Is this where He would have me to go? Is this the place that I'm to share His loving message? Is there where I'm being sent? And I've always wondered when the Lord commissioned His disciples – was it easy for them? Was it easy for them to leave that upper room after seeing the hands of Jesus and take on a whole new life as sharers of the life and Word that so many would despise? Was it just as hard for them, even though they saw the risen Lord before them to take it all on – or did God make it easier?

I would probably think – it was just as hard and maybe even a lot harder. We still have ourselves standing in the way. We get in the way and I'm sure it was that way with the disciples as well. We get in the way of the Lord's work – whether that be here or anywhere. It's easy to get in the way because we think we know better, we don't want things to change, or we don't completely understand. But, that's how we are. There are so many different things that stand in the way of looking into that tomb and noticing that there is nothing... no one in there. So many things get in our way. We get in the way. And when we get in the way, it's harder for others to see what the tomb looks like when He is not there.

But, here's our Lord, pushing us aside like He pushed aside the stone. You see, His Word continues to have free course because His Holy Spirit is present among us. Today, it is present among us in the confession of our faith and in the absolution of our sins. The Lord pushes us aside and shows those through His instruments that the tomb is empty and it is empty even for all those who are not yet seeing. The tomb is open and He lives for the sake of the whole world.

And here I am, given the opportunity to share that message from this place. Here I am with a privilege to do it from His pulpit. Here I am, sent by God to this part of His vineyard, to serve all of you. And here you are – and you are His people. Yes, we go and share that word with others. Yes we have that opportunity and privilege as all Christians do to share His life during Easter or any other time of the year. Yes, that's our privilege in this corner of the vineyard or wherever we are.

Sometimes the start of spring takes a little longer than usual. God sends the cold and warmth... the snow and the rain on His own time. However, one thing we can count on each year at around this time, is the celebration of Easter. Easter has come and we today are in the midst of it again. It's not a past event for us – it is a present reality. So today, we have been called as Christians to show the nail prints in the hands of Jesus to our neighbor. We can be called as Christians to stand for the truth a world that knows not the truth. That's heard – but here is the truth for you... It's what the disciples heard... "*Peace be with you.*" Peace be with you now, and throughout all eternity – no matter who you are and no matter where we happen to be. *Peace be with you* – and service Him for Christ is risen from the grave and that message is for all people. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.