

Sunday; May 1, 2022

The Great Mission Meeting

(Series: "From Meetings to Mission")

(Message Two)

(John 20:19-23)

Scripture:

¹⁹Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." ²²And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."
(John 20:19-23)

Message:

The door is locked. Deadbolted! Maybe even a chair under the doorknob. Inside are ten knee-knocking itinerants straddling the fence between faith and fear.

As you look around the room: Uneducated. Confused. Calloused. Heavy accents. Few social graces. Limited knowledge. No money. Untested leadership. And so on. They are a motley crew. Looking at them, you certainly wouldn't take them for a bunch who are about to change the course of human history.

And so, the Church of Jesus Christ began – behind closed and **locked doors**.

Though taught and trained, they didn't know what to say; though they had imitated him for three years, they didn't know what to do. Their teacher had been brutally killed on a cross; their dream had been destroyed; their future shattered; their most courageous act was to get up and lock the door.

Some watched the door; some looked at the wall; some looked at the floor; but they all looked inside...themselves; the silence was deafening; the solitude excruciating.

They were embarrassed; when the Romans took Jesus, they took off. With the bread and wine of the new covenant still in their belly and on their breath, they bailed.

All the promises and commitments they had made, all their boasts of bravado, all their declarations of devotion, all had been forgotten in the midst of their fears.

We don't know where they went when they disappeared, but we do know they couldn't get Jesus out of their head (or heart)...and so they had come back to be together.

The Apostle John writes this paragraph to summarize Jesus' first resurrection meeting with his disciples and to record Jesus' Resurrection Commissioning. Meetings with Jesus in the Gospels always turn into mission.

John tells us on Easter Sunday evening, Jesus, alive and well, appeared to his gathered disciples, gave them his **peace** (*"Peace to You"*), gave them bodily evidence of his resurrection (*"he showed them his hands and side"*), gave them purpose for their lives (his **mission**: *"as the Father has sent me, so send I you"*), gave them power to accomplish the mission (*"receive the Holy Spirit"*) and gave them the privilege of assuring people of the forgiveness of their sins (*"if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them"*)!

In these five verses, John brings together the resurrection and mission of Jesus - on the same day and in the same place. A Great **Meeting** following a Great **Miracle** requires a Great **Mission**; they all have an immediacy and an urgency.

For John, this meeting defines the life, witness, and authority of the Church - which have been on his mind as he has written this entire Gospel. Let's take a look...

THE GREAT MEETING (20:19)

They didn't know what to do, so they had come back to **huddle together.**

Things haven't changed much in **two thousand** years, have they? How many congregations are still paralyzed by fear hiding behind closed doors? How many congregants have just enough religion to come together, but not enough confidence to go out?

The doors aren't (literally) locked, but they often might as well be; we have little faith with little fire:

"We're doing our part for world evangelism; last year we sent out ten correspondence courses - we're anticipating a response any day now..."

“We care! We send \$150 a month to...uh, well...ol’, what’s his name, you know, in...uh, I forget the place...but we pray for him all the time.”

“Neighborhood Evangelism is a high priority! We have plans to plan a planning session to plan what we can do; at least that’s what we’re planning to do...”

We love our holy huddles, our comfortable sanctuaries, the security of being together; and yet, we often forget about our mission, i.e., what Christ expects from us as his disciples.

Good people, great intentions; caught up in budgets, meetings, words, promises, micromanaging. The doors remain locked; but the Story remains well-preserved inside.

What will it take to **unlock** those doors? To overcome their fears? To get them (us) out of the room and into the world, out of the meeting and into mission?

More training? They had trained under the best (Jesus) for three years!

A better strategy? A greater vision? The Holy Spirit was on his way!

There’s really only one thing that is necessary; one thing that can’t be overlooked; one element so vital that its absence insures failure.

In 20:19c, John writes, “Jesus came and stood in the **middle of them and said, “Peace be with you”**

The resurrected Jesus bypasses the bolted doors and stands in the middle of them. Jesus’ physical body has been raised and transformed: the stone of the tomb was not enough to keep him in; the walls of a room are no longer able to keep him out.

And, notice, he takes his rightful place - in the **middle** of them (this idea is missing in the NIV). Three days before Jesus was in the middle - between two insurrectionists. Now on resurrection day, he stands in the middle of his disciples (that is, the Church). The next Sunday when Thomas is there, he will be in the middle again (cf. **20:26**).

Jesus is where Jesus wants to be - in the middle of them. (Christ-centeredness is key in John’s Gospel, and essential to being a disciple). And the Gospel’s mission is to center him in every person, in every life.

And he says, “**Shalom** (a)lechem” (“Peace be yours”). Suddenly every head lifts; every eye turns; every mouth drops; not only were the words familiar, the voice was too. Some looked at the door - it was still bolted.

The risen Lord’s first gift to his disciples is his peace, i.e., his love, forgiveness, favor, and his blessing. It was not a command, but a blessing.

Notice, the one who was betrayed had just stepped into community with the ones who betrayed him. And what did he say: "What a bunch of losers!" No. "I told you so, but you never did listen." No. "So where were you when I needed you most?" No.

He said, "*Peace be with you*" - the thing they needed and didn't have was the very thing he offered.

It was a *moment* they'd never forget; it was a *story* they would never cease to tell.

THE GREAT REALITY (20:20)

In 20:20a, John writes, "*Jesus showed them his *hands* and his *side*.*"

In showing them his hands and side, Jesus is saying, "*Here is the reason for the peace I'm offering: my resurrection is not a wish or a promise; it is empirical truth!*" "*Your Rabbi Jesus, who was crucified, dead and buried, is really alive again!*"

Jesus provides palpable, empirical, physical, **undeniable evidence** of his resurrection. Jesus has been historically, **literally**, bodily, not just spiritually, raised from the dead.

John continues, "*The disciples were absolutely ecstatic; they were *focused on the Lord*.*" (20:20b)

This is one of those **too good** to be true moments you only dream about. So good was this moment that they were still saying, "*Pinch me; I must be dreaming,*" on the day of ascension (cf. **Matthew 28:17**). No wonder they were always in the temple **praising God**. (**Luke 24:53**)

In a few weeks, the paranoid Peter will boldly proclaim the Gospel: "*People, be assured of this, God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ!*" There would be no timidity in his words that day, not a hint of reluctance, hesitation, or fear. And the eternal destiny of three thousand people changed in one day!

What unlocked the doors of this *room* and the doors of their *hearts*?

The answer is simple, really. They encountered (i.e., met) **Jesus...risen and alive**; they encountered Christ.

Their sins, betrayal, denials collided with the Savior and their **Savior won**. What lit their fire was the red-hot conviction that the one who should have sent them to hell went to hell for them and came back to tell them about it.

Church historian Jaroslav Pelikan: "*If the resurrection of Jesus actually happened, nothing else really matters. If the resurrection of Jesus did not actually happen, then nothing else really matters!*"

THE GREAT MISSION (20:21)

John writes, *“Then Jesus said to them again, “Shalom (a)lechem” (“Peace be yours”) Just as the Father has **sent** me, so now I am **sending** you, too!” (20:21)*

If we actually believe Jesus’ bodily resurrection is true, then it follows that this most important of world realities must be **shared** with the whole world.

Jesus says, *“Disciples are to be sent just as Jesus was.”* How was Jesus sent?

John tells us: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son so that every single individual who simply trusts in him will not self-destruct, but have deep lasting life.” (John 3:16)*

Now Jesus is saying, *“For God so loved the world that he sends Christians, you and me, those who have “met” (spent time) with Jesus, those who simply trust in him, out into his world on his mission.”*

So these two simple words (Four in English: *“I am sending you”*) create a **world-wide** movement. The disciples go and proclaim the Good News of a risen Lord; people believed and became followers of this death-conqueror; this group, the Church, grew quickly.

People began to call them “Christ-ians” (i.e., *“little Christs”*); they talked like Christ; they acted like Christ; they loved like Christ; they forgave like Christ. They would preach *“Jesus Christ and him crucified”* - not for lack of another topic, but because they were so excited and passionate about this one.

Over the next few decades their lives would be transformed: nights away from home; hunger gnawing at their stomachs; rain soaking their skin; thrown stones bruising their body; shipwrecks, lashings, martyrdom.

But in the midst of all the heartache and suffering, there was one scene they would never forget: the **betrayed** one come back to his **betrayers**, not to rebuke or scourge them, but to offer them his peace and send them out into the world to grow his Church and bless his world.

This mission Jesus gives to his first disciples applies to all who recognize him as the resurrected Christ, have experienced his “peace” and follow him in obedience.

THE GREAT GIFT (20:22)

Representing Christ in this world is an **immense responsibility** - too heavy for even believing and commissioned disciples to bear. So, with his post-resurrection coming, Jesus offers them (us) a gift: *“Receive the Holy Spirit.”*

Notice, Jesus requires no pre-conditions for his gift, e.g., repent, confess, yield, trust. Jesus demands no response or reaction from his disciples, e.g., good works, proclaiming the gospel, leaving the confines of the room. Jesus gives his Holy Spirit just as he has given himself - as a sheer gift.

One commentator (Dale Bruner) said, *"The only way they could have missed receiving Jesus' gift is if they would have ducked when Jesus breathed on them."*

This resurrection insufflation (Google it, ☺), as it is called, reminds the Bible reader of **creation**.

Remember when *"God formed a man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being."* (**Genesis 2:7**) That was the first Creation.

On this Easter day, the day the New Creation begins. There is a new breath of air - once again it is God-breathed.

The prophet **Ezekiel (36:26f)** writes, *"A new heart I will give you, and a new Spirit I will put within you...you shall be my people, and I will be your God."*

The Risen Christ has just given his disciples the gift of his resurrection. And now he adds his **presence**, his peace, his body as evidence, his mission of representation, and his gift of the **Holy Spirit** as empowerment.

"My Lord, what an evening!"

THE GREAT PRIVILEGE (20:23)

Jesus continues (John 20:23) - "Whoever's sins you forgive, they have been forgiven..."

God gave this gift of forgiving to his **Son**, Jesus (**Mark 2:1-12**); now the **Son** gives this same God-given gift to his **disciples**. This forgiveness is an unmerited gift Jesus gives to those who trust in him.

Disciples don't make this gift for others; they simply share it with believers. Disciples are to be "for-giving"; i.e., they are to "give-forth;" to pass along the Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection and the resulting forgiveness.

And at the same time, they are to warn those (i.e., *"pronounce as unforgiven"*) who are unrepentant and refuse to believe Christ is risen!

Jesus gives this privilege and responsibility to these first disciples implicitly and to his **Church** explicitly.

Do you remember your first encounter with Jesus?

I do. As a senior in high school, I started meeting with four or five friends on Sunday afternoon asking the fundamental questions: What is Christianity and Church all about?

Jesus showed up and the group grew. In a couple of months, we had over 250 high school students meeting Sunday afternoon at Woodland Skating rink - we worshipped, talked about Jesus, we led chapels in all the area Christian schools. We simply called our fellow students to a personal relationship with Jesus. *The Banner* labeled us “the underground church.”

It became my call to ministry; remembering what God did has encouraged me through some hard times.

You see, there is a direct correlation between **remembering** our **encounter(s)** with Jesus (i.e., our meetings with him) and the **effectiveness** of our **mission**.

If we're not sharing the good news of Jesus' resurrection, might it be because we haven't yet encountered the risen Savior in our own life? If we're not proclaiming the message of forgiveness, might it be because we don't really know or have forgotten what it feels like to be guilty? If we're not talking about Christ crucified with our neighbors, could it be we've subconsciously decided - God forbid - we don't really care where they will be spending eternity.

In Paul's last letter to Timothy, he begs Timothy not to forget: “*Remember Jesus Christ...raised from the dead, a descendant of David. This is my gospel...*” (2 Timothy 2:8)

When times get hard, remember Jesus; when the tears come, remember Jesus; when disappointment shadows you, remember Jesus; when fear keeps you locked in the room, remember Jesus; when death looms, remember Jesus. Remember Jesus is risen and alive! Remember when you first met him.

Remember his calloused hands healed the sick; remember his Galilean accent called the dead to life; remember his eyes wept human tears; remember his *cross words* were compassionate, forgiving, grace-filled and trusting.

Remember he “finished” all the suffering required of him; remember he died to satisfy and atone for all our sins; and remember, on the third day God raised him from the dead!

Are you still in love with Jesus?

Before you remember anything else, remember him; if you forget anything, don't forget him. The problem is forgetting is all too easy.

Like a best friend from school, we slowly lose touch; it's not like we deliberately turn away, life happens - marriage, kids, job changes, moving; Christ gets forgotten.

When was the last time you consciously experienced Christ in the room? When was the last time you had a meeting with Jesus in the privacy of your “Upper Room”? A Great Meeting following a Great Miracle requires a Great Mission.

He’s still here; he hasn't moved; in the midst of all the other voices, he still speaks.

Do yourself an eternal favor. **Come stand** before him again. Come, literally and stand before his cross; remember the **words** he spoke there for you (and me).

Or **go** to your “Upper Room” and **wait**...until he comes; and when he comes, linger, and notice the nail holes in his hands and feet were for you.

Or come to his table; let him break bread with you; enjoy his fellowship.

Don’t miss the **resurrected Savior**; embrace his **peace**; he’ll transform your life!

Prayer:

Father, thank you that Jesus, after you raised him from the dead, came to meet with his disciples, granted them his peace, offered conclusive evidence of his resurrection, and called us to be a part of your and his great mission for this world.

Father, we confess that we spend too much of our time and attention on the “huddle” and too little time on the (mission) “field.”

Father, we long to spend more time meeting with Jesus, that we may be reminded of his love for us, and that we might be energized to be on mission for him. In the name of the Risen Christ, Amen.