

*\*note: this sermon was preached on the morning that our church ordained new church leaders and commissioned fourteen others to three different service sites.*

John 20:19-23

We find the disciples on the evening of that crazy day. The women were saying that Jesus is not dead but alive.

It is evening of **that** day. And they are hiding behind closed doors.

They are afraid of the Jews.

Why?

If you read John's gospel you will find out why. The way John tells the story, the Jews are the villains.

They don't even wait for Jesus in chapter 1. They go after John the Baptist already. (1:19ff)

At every turn they challenge, resist, antagonize, intimidate and plot to kill.

In John's gospel everyone is afraid of the Jews.

It says so in chapter 7:13.

In 9:22 it is the parents of the man born blind.

In 19:38 it is Joseph of Arimathea.

The Jews are the bad guys in this gospel. At the end they demand the freedom of a murderer and the death of the innocent, sinless Jesus.

We have to be very careful as we read this story. Some people have used it to find a reason to hate Jewish people in the past and even still today. Some will say, "well, "they are like that". Really?

As a little test, replace “the Jews” with “the Dutch”, or “the French” or “the British”, or “the Germans” and see how it affects how you feel about those people groups.

The bigger picture, the larger story is that **God** handed his Son Jesus over to crucifixion for all of us sinners. We know that.

The disciples though, are **in** the story. They don't know it, yet.

The disciples are sitting in fear because the people who handed Jesus over to the Romans are still out there.

Jesus' friends are afraid they will get the same treatment Jesus got.

Thinking of their fears leads us to examine our own.

“Is there a fear that keeps us hiding behind ‘closed doors?’

Are there any fears on your minds as you get ready to serve as a council member, as you go to China, (a communist country) South Africa or Regina? We don't know exactly what we will be doing in Regina, but being part of VBS is I think on the list. Maybe we will be going door to door to invite kids to come. I had to do that once when I was in high school. I was sent out with a girl named Deb. It was a good thing because she was not afraid to knock on doors, and I didn't want her to see that I was.

Many of my own fears still have to do with what someone may say about me or about what I am doing.

It hurts to be criticized or attacked.

Those who are leaders make easy targets. If you put yourself out there you expose yourself to attacks far more than if you hide in your basement.

It's kind of sobering to talk about our fears on a day of commissioning, but the text takes us to this place.

The disciples huddle together so their enemies won't find them. But Jesus does.

Jesus really is back from the dead. He really is alive. He knows where to find his friends. He comes and stands in their midst and says to them, "Peace be with you". It's dangerous and frightening out there, but I am with you, you are safe with me. "Peace, all is well!"

He shows them his wounds. That is how they know it is Jesus for sure.

They are overjoyed. Of course. Jesus is with them.

They could sit in that room for a long time and just worship him.

Everything will be ok, because Jesus is here! He is with us!

But we can never **stay** in our safe places and worship Jesus.

It is Jesus himself who will not allow it.

He says again, "Peace be with you". It is like he said, "Peace be with you in your fears", now "Peace be with you" as you go out there. Because just as the Father sent me, I am sending you".

"Just as the Father sent me, with his authority, on his mission, I am sending you".

"The Father sent me to preach, to teach, to bless, to heal, to save, to lay down my life, to show the world the Father's love".

Now I am sending you.

Out there! With my authority. To preach, to teach, to bless, to heal and to save, to witness to me, to lay down your lives and to show the world my love.

I am sending you out into the world, where the Jews are, where people will respond to you as they responded to me. Some will hear you and welcome you with joy and excitement. But others will oppose you, frighten and intimidate you.

Jesus says to all of us, “as the Father has sent me, I am sending you...”, into the world full of people that I love, some will hear and welcome and bless you, others may oppose you.

In your work as council leaders, as you go to China, Africa or Regina, people will receive you with love and bless you, but others may oppose you and frustrate you.

Do you think the disciples got a bit nervous when they saw Jesus, alive but wounded, and understood that he was sending them out there? He points the way forward with his nail-scarred hands.

Jesus does two things for them:

First, he breathes into his followers, his own breath, his Spirit. This is intimate. It reminds us of when the Lord God made the first people from mud, forming, shaping them, then breathing into them the breath of life. Next time you are at the dentist office and the dentist or the hygienist is right there in your face, remember this story. You need to feel someone’s breath in your face to appreciate how intimate this is.

Just as God breathed life into the man and woman at creation, Jesus breathes his own new life into his followers.

His breath, his Spirit.

His Spirit is the Spirit of courage.

Jesus gives us **his** Spirit of courage to go in his name. Out there where the mission is often scary to us. We only experience the courage of his Spirit when we go, when we take the first step, no matter what that mission might be. The shortest mission trips in the world, might just be the most important. Those are the ones where we turn all the way to our right or to our left and welcome the person beside us in church on Sundays. Or, if we walk all the way across the street to help our neighbour.

People have wondered what to do about those lines about forgiveness. “If you forgive, they are forgiven, if you hold on to their sins, they are not forgiven....

What do we do with that?

Certainly it is true that the disciples would go out with the good news of forgiveness in Jesus’ name. But that does not seem to be what Jesus is talking about here. He is talking about the disciples and whether or not they will forgive.

Do you find that even thinking about these lines opens up all kinds of stuff in you? We all have issues with forgiveness. We have needed it and it hasn’t been given to us. Others have needed our forgiveness and we have withheld it. We have experienced the joy of being forgiven by God and by others. We may have forgiveness issues in our marriages.

These verses open up far more than we can get into this morning.

For now, let us notice this: Jesus sends us out with two things, with his Holy Spirit for strength and courage and with the reminder ahead of time to forgive anyone who might hurt us or oppose us.

If the disciples are intimidated by opposition, or if they fight back, if they do **anything else but forgive**, their mission won't go anywhere.

And not much is different today. If we are intimidated by people, or if we fight back, the work of Jesus does not get very far.

Whether your mission this summer is here at home, or somewhere far away, may Jesus bless you with his Spirit of courage and give you the strength to forgive.

May the Lord be gracious to you, may the Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said, Amen.

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