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John 20:19-23
So That You May Believe: John
“Sending You on a Mission”

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If you’ve been part of the Rose Hill family for the last few years or more, you may recall that one occasional theme in my sermons is to help us see how scientific discoveries about the universe, or archaeology, line up well with what the Bible tells us. Over the centuries there have been a lot of walls built up – both by Christians and non-Christians – between Scripture and various disciplines of science and other forms of research. And yet if God really did create everything, and if the Bible records accurate history, it’s inconceivable that we would ever discover something that is truly oppositional to what Scripture says. It might take some study and deeper reflection sometimes (on Scripture, and/or the scientific/historical information) to understand...but it’s not like the study of our world and the solar system and the rest of the universe is going to yield anything that surprises God, because he put it all there in the first place.

That being said, there’s one question that science really can’t answer, and never will be able to. And it pertains to today’s passage. That question is: **What is the purpose of humankind?** Why are we here? What is the point, and the purpose, of human life? What’s the purpose of your life...of my life? Maybe that’s a question you’ve asked or heard others ask. In today’s passage we get an answer to that question. It is far from being the only place in Scripture where this answer is given, but this is one place it’s given and it couldn’t be more clearly spelled out for us. Let’s turn to **John 20:19-23**, as we continue in our series through the Gospel according to John.

Earlier in John 20, we read of the empty tomb of Jesus and then his personal appearance to Mary. Next week, there is a personal encounter with the disciple, Thomas, who John tells us at that point was not in the room in today’s reading. Later, Jesus deals with Peter in a one-to-one kind of way. So, we see several cases of individual people encountering the risen Christ. What we see in these encounters, is that faith in Jesus begins when we individually encounter the resurrected Christ. He may not appear to us today as he did to them – where we can see him, touch him, see the hole in his side and in his wrists and feet – but: **In some way, shape, or form, Jesus makes**

himself known to us as the resurrected Christ: death defeated, and the doorway to eternal life opened up. Faith begins when we encounter Jesus.

And in today's passage – and we see this elsewhere, too – we see 10 disciples (Thomas is absent, and Judas has exited stage left after betraying Jesus) get an encounter with the risen Christ in a group setting, with Jesus giving them their directives as a group, as well. We see that faith is not just an individual thing – as if a person could be a solitary Christian – but discipleship is intended to be done with others.

So, the disciples were huddled together, perhaps in the same room where they'd been for the Passover meal with Jesus just a few days before. John tells us they were afraid. Why? Well, they're the disciples of Jesus - who just got crucified - and guilt by association isn't something that got invented in just the last century. **They feared that just by being associated with Jesus, their own deaths could be just around the corner.** Remember, Peter denied knowing Jesus shortly before his crucifixion because of a desire not to be associated with Jesus. And it was mostly women who were at the cross when Jesus died and were undoubtedly in a much safer position. John tells us of one disciple who was there – himself. The rest abandoned him. And so being huddled up here fits with their behavior from the previous 72 hours or so.

And even though the doors are locked, Jesus comes and stands among them. He gives them the opportunity to encounter his resurrected self – to see his side, to see his hands and feet. It's not a ghost, and it's not a group hallucination...Jesus is really standing there among them and yet somehow transcends the physical.

The first word he says is "Peace." Now, the New Testament is written in Greek, and Greek was certainly a language they were familiar with...but I would bet my house that Jesus spoke to them the Hebrew word for peace here – Shalom. **Shalom is not just the absence of tension or anxiety. It's a word that is more holistic than that, and means to be whole, to be sound, and safe.** It's what we need not just when we're afraid as the disciples were,

but at any time in life. And Jesus is the one who speaks this into our live, and gives us this shalom, this wholeness, this sense of being sound.

The response of the disciples to seeing him and hearing this word of blessing, is one of joy (“overjoyed” actually). **Joy is the most appropriate response to the resurrection of Jesus we could possibly have.** John puts it plainly and simply, not telling us anything more; but I imagine their response might’ve been like the crowd at a baseball game when the game-winning home run is hit in the bottom of the 9th inning...or when an audience’s favorite musical artist comes out on stage. Just pure elation.

Jesus then repeats his word of blessing to them, and then he gives them some directives that are the key to these verses, the key to being a disciple of Jesus, and answer the question of what on earth are we here for. **Jesus says to them, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).** The reason we are here on earth is to be in relationship with our Creator. We know this, because that was Jesus’ mission – to rectify the consequences of sin and bring people back into relationship with God our heavenly father. Jesus carried out that mission to the point of atoning for our sin on the cross. He’s the once for all, and once forever, sacrifice that pays the debt of our sin that otherwise separates us from God. So, his mission was to bring us back to God, back to relationship with him. That relationship is why we’re here, and no scientific discipline or archaeology or any other field of study will lead you there. Only Jesus can do that. If that’s a new message for you, I invite you to give it serious consideration and turn to Jesus to live into the true purpose for why you’re here on earth.

Once we’re in that relationship, once we trust Jesus and become his disciple, we then join in the mission Jesus has to bring people into relationship with him. **So, there’s a two-fold answer to this question of “why on earth am I here?” First, it’s to be in relationship with God through faith in Jesus. Second, once that relationship is established, our more focused purpose is to take on Jesus’ mission, and help lead others to be in relationship with God through faith in Jesus.** Being in relationship with God through faith in Jesus is not actually the end game. I think this is something we Christians oftentimes forget. We have that encounter with the resurrected

Jesus that sets our faith in motion...and we just kind of hang out there with Jesus: go to worship services, do some bible study, pray occasionally – especially when we’re facing a challenge and we hope for a “get out of jail free” card...so we just kind of hang out with Jesus in that way, and we call it the Christian life. But Jesus has a whole different vision for what it means to follow him. It includes those things...but He invites us, even commands us, to live on mission. And it’s the same mission he had: He wants us to help others meet the resurrected Christ just as we have.

The good news is he doesn’t send us out on our own. There are two resources he gives us. **First, he sends us with others, as the Church.** That’s the global church but also the local church body that you’re a part of. Look to your left and to your right...they are some of the people God has put in your life to aid you in living on mission for him. (If you’re disappointed...don’t worry, they might be thinking the same thing looking at you! And if that’s your spouse, then let’s chat later. 😊.) We are welcoming 7 new people into the Rose Hill Church family today. They are covenant partners on this mission that Jesus sends us on of leading people toward Jesus in every facet of our lives – where we live, work and play. That’s a good synopsis of Jesus’ mission when we look at the biographies of his life, and it’s the mission of our church. In other words, it’s all the same mission – and we’re on this mission together: encouraging one another, praying with and for one another, seeking to be the body of Christ together right where we are. We do that as the Church. That’s the first resource.

The second resource Jesus gives us is the Holy Spirit. Now, as many of you probably know, the more celebrated coming of the Holy Spirit happens about 50 days after the events in today’s passage, on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit comes upon a large group of believers in a powerful and obvious kind of way. It’s recorded for us in the book of Acts, in chapter 2.

In fact, what we have in today’s passage is not actually the coming of the Spirit into the disciples’ lives, because that is what happens in Acts 2. This seems to be more of a prophecy of the Spirit to come, along with a symbolic action by Jesus as he breathes on them. Because it’s clear that they aren’t actually filled with the Spirit here at this point. It’s not until after the Acts 2

event that they actually live spirit-filled lives. For instance, in next week's passage, we'll see that a week later they're still timid and locking themselves up in this house when they gather together. But after Acts 2, they boldly and publicly proclaim the message of the Gospel. Also, in Acts 1, the resurrected Jesus tells them to wait for the gift of the Spirit. Why would they need to wait for it if he actually breathed it into them here in John? So, what we read about here today is more of a foreshadowing, and a symbolic action, of what will happen some 50 days later. Regardless, the Spirit is given to encourage, convict, and give us the courage to live as Jesus' sent ones. The Spirit gives us the power needed to carry out Jesus' mission.

Then verse 23, where Jesus says, "if you forgive others of their sin, then they are forgiven, and if you don't they aren't"...it seems a little odd at first reading. But essentially, **Jesus is telling them what the message of their mission is: It's a message of forgiveness.** This should be no surprise because that's the message of the cross. It's all about God's forgiveness, and anyone who's been a Christian for at least 24 hours knows that the cross is central to the good news of Jesus. And in this statement, Jesus is highlighting for them that their lives impact the message and the mission. How we live – specifically, whether or not we live out forgiveness toward each other and toward the world – how we live that, or choose not to live it, impacts how people perceive Jesus and his message of forgiveness. If we live out forgiveness well, then people will experience the forgiveness of the cross and a right relationship with their heavenly father. If we don't, then it's going to be tougher for that message to get through to them.¹

So, like the disciples here, like disciples of Jesus ever since and throughout history: **You and I are sent on a mission for Jesus: to help people understand that they are here to be in relationship with God their Father and Creator through faith in Jesus the son who makes forgiveness and a right relationship with God even possible.** You are sent by Jesus to be his missionary with a message of forgiveness. You don't have to go overseas. You don't have to go on a mission trip. You don't need seminary training. You don't need to be ordained. You just have to live your faith by the power of the Spirit right where you are, seeking to lead others toward Jesus each and every day.

So, who is your missionary field? **Who has God sent you to?** About three months ago, I asked you to make a list of 5 people/households who God has put in your life, who don't know Jesus, and to be praying for them and to see them as your missionary field. Shame on me for not reminding you of this since then. But, today I am. My list of people is on my desk. Whoever is on your list, your job is to pray for them: their physical needs, emotional needs, their spiritual needs...you can pray for opportunities that God might give you to serve them, bless them, encourage them, and opportunities to talk with them about matters of faith. You're sent by Jesus to minister to those people, and to share with them the message of forgiveness, in other words the message of the cross, and the assurance of eternal life that we have all because of what Jesus has done to bring us into relationship with the God of the universe. That's his mission, and it's the mission that he gives us. I pray we live into that mission well each and every day with the people God has put in your life. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ Here are some more thoughts on this, that were partly influential in what I shared, but this contains additional information, too: <https://www.gotquestions.org/John-20-23.html>