

Dear Friends,

JOHN 20: 20-23

It's the day of the resurrection. Jesus has come to his friends and given them peace turning them from fear to joy.

He shows them the marks of crucifixion. The evidence that this risen Jesus is the person who suffered the cross. No substitute died in his place. The wounds show the continuation with what came before. But he is also different. He can appear in a room when the door is locked and as we learn in another story he can also vanish from sight.

He says to them again "Peace be with you." We are invited to carry God's peace in our hearts, but we are also sent out to share that peace with others. So, Jesus adds a commission to the gift of peace. He says "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Jesus had been sent by the Father. Sent by God, he had lived a life of perfect obedience. Now it's our turn to be sent by Jesus. We won't manage perfect obedience but we can make it our aim to follow him more nearly day by day. The friends can see before their eyes the consequence for Jesus of being sent by God, it left him wounded. They and we can expect a measure of suffering too.

But God is our shepherd and we won't lack anything we really need. So, Jesus not only sends he also equips. He breathes on his friends and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." John the Baptist said that while he baptised with water Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit. John baptised by immersing people in the river Jordan. As he plunged people in water so Jesus would entirely surround people with the Holy Spirit. Now, the time for that spirit baptism had come.

As Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit another Bible story comes to mind. In the beginning God made a human creature out of the dust of the ground. God breathed into the nostrils of the creature who became a living being. Jesus breathes upon his friends and this odd mixed bag of people become a new creation.

And Jesus is very near to you now, closer than your skin. He is breathing the Holy Spirit upon you and into you, strengthening you for this moment whatever it holds.

A key element of the work that Jesus gives is that of sharing forgiveness. He speaks some sobering words. "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." We may wonder when to forgive and when to withhold forgiveness. Peter asked Jesus that question. He said, "How often should I forgive?" He came up with his own suggestion, "As many as seven times?" He thought Jesus would applaud him for being generous. To forgive seven times, that's a lot of forgiving. But no, it fell short of Jesus' teaching. He said, "Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times." It could even be translated seventy times seven times. That is, don't even count, just keep forgiving. Perhaps, we can also remember the prayer Jesus taught, "Forgive us our trespasses as we

forgive those who trespass against us.” We have received God’s grace, surely now it is for us not to withhold but to generously share forgiveness.

So, Jesus sent them. The strength they needed was theirs through the Holy Spirit. Now, they were ready for anything. Except that they weren’t all there. One of them, Thomas, was missing. The good shepherd is not going to allow even one to be left behind. This community that is a new creation, won’t fully be that unless everyone takes their place together in it. So, what will Jesus who died to draw all people to himself do about the one who has not yet come to him?

God bless you,

Tony