

Dear friends,

John 20: 21-23

Maybe the friends of Jesus have become a bit over excited. Jesus, who died, is alive and is with them. They thought that their lives were at an end. Now they realise that everything is really only just beginning. Perhaps they are feeling a little high. There is, however, something to be done. So, Jesus brings them back to peace, where they can be open to what he wants to give and receptive to his commission. He says again, "Peace be with you" and then he continues, "as the Father has sent me so I send you".

At the beginning of John's gospel, Jesus is described as being in the Father's heart and as making God known. He is in the Father's heart. He abides in God. He is God's beloved son in whom God delights. And he is sent out to make God known, so that when people meet Jesus, they know that through him they are also encountering God. Now Jesus, in the same way, sends out his friends. They are in his heart. They abide in him. He loves and delights in them. He sends them out to make him known. When people meet his friends, the hope is that they will have an encounter with Jesus.

And you are in the heart of Jesus. You abide in him. He loves and delights in you. And he sends you out to make him known.

How do you make Jesus known? One way, is through a life of generous self-giving. God gives. Jesus says, "God so loved the world that he gave his only son". Jesus makes God known by also being one who gives. No one takes his life from him. He lays it down of his own free will. He says, "this is my body given for you, this is my blood shed for you". Having told them that he gives, he goes on to ask them to do the same. He says, "do this in remembrance of me". That does mean, "eat bread and wine and remember my self-giving", but maybe it also means, "as I have given, so you also may give". It is in giving himself that Jesus makes God known. It is in giving ourselves that we make Jesus known.

And one element of our giving is the giving of forgiveness. In our passage, Jesus gives his friends the authority to forgive and the authority to withhold forgiveness. That's an awesome responsibility. He has, however, also taught them a prayer to place alongside this responsibility. The prayer reminds them how they are to exercise the responsibility. He tells them to say, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us". If we ever dare to think that we have the right to withhold forgiveness, then we need carefully to remember that we are those who need God's forgiveness.

The friends of Jesus are an example. They have just experienced forgiveness. They were filled with guilt and were reproaching themselves for having failed. They were convinced that Jesus would give up on them and abandon them. He did no such thing. He came to them and said "Peace be with you". They know that they have

been forgiven much. They know that they are in no position to withhold from others the forgiveness which God has given them.

As Jesus sent out his friends, so he sends you to make him known. You do that by getting caught up in his giving, including the giving of forgiveness.

Jesus, however, knows that his friends will need help in making him known. They will need strength and gifts. So, he gives them everything they need. He comes really close to them, close enough so that they can feel his breath, and he breathes into them, and says, "receive the Holy Spirit". With the gift of the Spirit, they are equipped and empowered for the work of self-giving, for the work of making Jesus known.

And you are to stand firm, to allow Jesus to be very close to you, close enough so that you can feel his breath as he breathes the Spirit into you, strengthening you, empowering you, equipping you with all you need so that you too may share in the work of self-giving, in the work of making Jesus known.

God bless you,

Tony