

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

31st May 2020 - Pentecost

JOHN 20:19-23

SENT OUT IN GOD'S PEACE

Isolated. Shut away from the world. Unable to see family and friends. For some people their life, and even their livelihood, being put on hold. Afraid to go out because of what the authorities might do if they saw you. Unsure about the future, and how all this will end. Feeling more anxious, worried, and even afraid than usual. Wishing you could turn back the clock to when everything was normal once again.

I'm guessing I'm getting a few nods and murmurs of, 'I hear ya', right now? Is that right? For all of us what I have just described has been our 'normal' for at least the past 8 or so weeks now. Depending on where you are as you are watching this we are starting to come out of the restrictions a bit, but still those feelings of being isolated, uncertainty about the future, financial or employment instability, and in some cases even fear or anxiety, are perhaps not too far away.

This might be a situation we are going through right now, but all these things are also what the disciples were experiencing on the day we celebrate today, Pentecost. It's the day when we remember that God sent the Holy Spirit into the world just as Jesus had promised, and that the followers of Jesus were transformed from hiding away in fear and isolation, to taking the Gospel, the good news of God's forgiveness, out to the world.

In the New Testament we have two accounts of that initial sending of the Holy Spirit into the world. There is the well-known one in Acts chapter 2. In this case, 50 days after Easter, and 10 days after Jesus has gone back to heaven, many followers of Jesus are gathered, afraid and locked away, in a room. Suddenly there is a sound like rushing wind, and flames come and land on their heads. They are transformed by this coming of the Holy Spirit so now they go boldly outside and tell everyone of their faith, even being able to speak in all the different languages of the people who have

come to visit Jerusalem at this time. The transformation of Jesus' followers is so dramatic, and their message so effective, that we are told 3,000 people believe it and are baptised on that day alone.

And then, there is John's account, our Gospel reading for today in John 20. Here the coming of Holy Spirit is a bit softer, less dramatic, and less public, but no less effective. It is the night of Easter Sunday. After seeing Jesus die on the cross on Friday, and, much to their shame and sorry having abandoned him at that time, that very morning, the third day after His death, Peter, John and Mary Magdalene had gone to Jesus' tomb and found it empty. To make the mystery even greater, Mary claimed that later she had seen and spoken to Jesus himself! How can that be possible? Afraid, ashamed, not knowing what they should do now or what would happen next, they locked themselves away in a room.

And then, just like that, Jesus was in that room standing among them. Where had He come from? How had He got in? How would He now treat them, when they knew that at the very least they deserved a severe tongue lashing for the way they had abandoned Him?

Now we see what is a beautiful, loving, story, and one which tells us so much about Jesus' relationship with us all. Jesus' first words to the disciples aren't anger, or rebuke, or even sorrow. He says to them, 'Peace be with you'. As Jesus says earlier in John, chapter 14, He gives peace not as the world gives, but peace which means we don't have to be worried or afraid. At the time when they are afraid, ashamed, worried, Jesus' first action is to give them His peace; an assurance that everything is ok, and everything will be ok. God's peace.

And then, after proving to them that it really is Him by showing them the wounds from His crucifixion, Jesus gives the disciples His peace again. He knows they need it right now. But now He goes further with that, and He sends them out. The Father had sent Jesus, and now, having completed His work, Jesus sends His followers out to continue this mission, so that the peace they know can be known by others also. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (21b)

'Well, thanks, Lord, but we have seen what you have been through, and that seems a pretty daunting task!', is quite possibly what the disciples are thinking now. But Jesus doesn't stop with the

sending: He breathes on them and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (22b). God’s breath of new life. The breath which brings about a new Creation. The word used for ‘breath’ in the Old Testament is the same as the word used for ‘Spirit’. And so the same breath or Spirit of God which was breathed on Adam to give Him life in Genesis 2, and brought the dry bones in the valley back to life in Ezekiel 37, now brings new life, new creation, transformation, to Jesus’ followers as they are sent out. They are assured, they are transformed, they are sent out. And just how effective this transformation is, how strong the power of the Holy Spirit is, is shown by the fact that here we are, 2,000 years later, even in these times when we can’t physically meet together, here we are still worshipping Him, believing in Him, basing our lives on Him, putting all of our hope in Him. The new life, the new creation, brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit still comes to us today also.

The Holy Spirit brings us God’s peace, because the Spirit brings us to faith in God and keeps us in that faith. Know God’s peace – it is there for you, whatever you are going through. Live in God’s peace – allow the Holy Spirit to comfort you, transform you, lead and guide you in all you do. Go out in God’s peace – by your words, your actions, your life, show and share what this peace means to you in your life so others can know and experience it also. Amen.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank you for giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Help us to keep our hearts and minds open to the work of the Spirit, so we can continue to know your peace and to take your message of love and forgiveness out to the world. Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/REFLECTION:

The Means of Grace

In the Lutheran Church we talk about the Means of Grace, God’s Word and the two Sacraments (Baptism and Holy Communion) as being how the Holy Spirit today comes to us to: remind us of God’s love for us, which never ends; show us how we stray from God and need His forgiveness; lead us to turn away from our sins and come back to following God’s path for our life; equip and empower us to take the message God’s love out to the world.

- Think about/discuss; how does the Holy Spirit work through God’s Word, the Bible, in these ways? It may be when we read it, hear it, have it explained to us, see it being lived out in the lives of Christians. How does the Spirit speak to you, lead you, and empower you through God’s Word?

- Think about/discuss; how does the Holy Spirit work through your Baptism in these ways? Even if you can't remember it, which many of us can't, our baptism is effective because it relies on the Holy Spirit's power, not ours. Do you often think of your baptism? What was God saying to you when He brought you into His family through baptism, creating a relationship which He will never break?
- Think about/discuss; how does the Holy Spirit work through Holy Communion in these ways? What is God, through the Holy Spirit, saying to you every time you have Holy Communion? How does the body and blood of Jesus remind you of God's forgiveness? How does receiving the peace and assurance of this forgiveness strengthen and equip you to now go out to live and serve in God's name?

In God's Peace

The Peace of God is often referred to in the Bible. To greet someone by wishing them peace, *Shalom*, was a traditional Jewish greeting. But God's peace is above how we might wish someone peace. It is described in the Bible as the 'Peace which passes all understanding', and Jesus calls it, 'The peace which only I can give'.

- How would you describe God's peace?
- Try and describe what God's peace means to you in your life, how it makes you feel. You might use words, or a picture, an analogy, or relate it to a feeling or experience.
- Most of us will not feel God's peace all the time; stuff happens in our world and in our lives which sometimes takes this feeling of peace away from us. When this happens is there anything you do to try and experience this peace with God again?

Sent Out

A big part of the coming of the Holy Spirit is that we are now sent out with this power to take the message of God's love to the world. This is the message of the Gospel; that God loves all people and wants everyone to come to Him and receive the forgiveness He offers us through Jesus, so that they too can experience His great peace in their lives

- This call, this sending out, applies to each one of us, no matter who we are, how old we are, what we do, how we believe we are gifted. How do you believe God is calling you to witness to him?
- What gifts and abilities has God given you so can point to Him and His love? What situations has He placed you in that are mission opportunities?
- If you sometimes find this hard and daunting, and feel that you aren't always good at it or faithful to the call, that's ok, most of us feel like that at times. God's forgiveness is there for us at these times too. Pray about this, and ask God to show you how to use the opportunities to witness He places before you, and to guide you to make your life a living witness to Him.

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