

Read: **John 20:1-23**

John 20:19-23

Introduction

This morning, as we gather to celebrate the fact that He has risen. His exodus from the grave must cause our lives to be profoundly different. By His resurrection we have been given victory over the grave and power for living. But not living as usual, but living in a new way. I believe this morning that His victory over death has given us the opportunity to live for Him. It has given us the power to live for Him and this morning I believe that we live for Him when we discipline ourselves to follow His ways.

There are many ways in which we do this. We spend time in His Word so that we are able to understand who He is. We spend time in prayer, listening to God speak into our lives. We also should disciple ourselves to engage the world around us with the Gospel. We do so through evangelism.

Evangelism is not always considered a spiritual discipline, though it clearly is. Donald S. Whitney in his book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* writes, “evangelism is the natural overflow of the Christian life. We should all be able to talk about what the Lord has done for us and what He means to us. But evangelism is also a Discipline in that we must discipline ourselves to get into the context of evangelism, that is, we must not just wait for witnessing opportunities to happen.” The Bible has a clear message to “make disciples” in **Matthew 28:19** and yet clearly that message does not take root in the lives of most believers.

Evangelism, out of all the spiritual disciplines, is no doubt the one that causes the most anxiety for the believer. Mark Dever has said that most Christians fail to achieve the goals of Scripture when it comes to evangelism. He writes, “‘Flunk’ is a word we don’t use much anymore. It’s a hard, sharp, inflexible kind of word. But it’s probably a good word to use to quickly summarize how most of

us have done in obeying the call to evangelize. Jesus calls people to be fishers of men, but we prefer to watch. Peter says to always be ready to give a reason for the hope that we have, but we are not. Solomon says he who wins souls is wise, but we flunk.”

Evangelism, above all the others, forces the us as believers to engage those who come to mind when reading the words of Jesus when He said in **John 15:18-10**, “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you” However, the importance of evangelism is indisputable and the results of a life lived without this spiritual discipline is no less than sin. There is no doubt that evangelism must be present in the life of the believer.

The Apostle Paul even goes as far as saying there will not be belief in the Lord without evangelism when he writes of the importance of sharing the Gospel in his letter to the Romans. He states in **10:12-15**, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for ‘WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’ How then will they call on Him in who they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And who will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!’” This removes any question as to the clear command from the Lord that those who are “His children” (Jn 1:12; Rom 8:16-17) are to share the message of the Gospel.

Our text this morning, **John 20:19-23**, along with other texts such as Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:44-49; and Acts 1:8, presents a clear picture of the commission/commandment that Jesus gave to His disciples just after

His resurrection and prior to His ascension. This commission is the central frame work for any quest to spread the Gospel of Christ to people who Paul refers to as “those who are perishing” (1Cor 1:18; 2Cor 2:15, 4:3). In this text we are able to clearly see how to be a part of evangelism for the Kingdom of God in our everyday life. This text is the simplest of five in its presentation of the commands of Christ for the disciples. Jesus makes four statements that can clearly help us, as disciples of Christ, to have make evangelism a part of our routine in life. Those statements are: Peace be with you (19, 21); as the Father has sent Me, I also send you (21); Receive the Holy Spirit (22); If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained (23). We will look at one of them this morning, and the rest in the coming weeks.

Peace Be With You

Peace be with you is a standard phrase from the Near East during the time of Christ and would have been a common way for the disciples to have been greeted by their Teacher. This idea of peace is an obvious place to start when looking at evangelism in the spiritual life of the believer. We must understand that nothing could have been further from peace for those who were in the room with Jesus considering the turmoil they had experienced in the previous few days. Their Master, who they had followed for several years, had been betrayed by one of their own number (Jn 18:1-9), arrested by the Romans (Jn 18:12), tried before the Jewish and Roman authorities (Jn 18:19-24; 28-40; 19:1-15), sentenced to death (Jn 19:16), nailed to a cross (Jn 19:18), died (Jn 19:30) and was buried (Jn 19:38-42). This left no peace. They had deserted Jesus in the moment they should have stood boldly beside Him, just as Christ had said they would. (Jn16:32) They were followers of a man convicted of blasphemy (Jn 19:7) and they could have very well been the next ones nailed to a cross. They now find themselves on the first day of the week (Jn 20:19) and their turmoil has continued. The body of their

Master is gone from the grave (Jn 20:2) and it is unclear to some of them what has happened. Has He risen? Has His body been stolen? And then the most unexpected thing occurs; that thing which He has promised all along. He appears to them as they sit in a locked room afraid of what is about to happen to them (Jn 20:19). Jesus comes and stands in their midst and says *Peace be with you*. Everything has changed in this moment. Not only is their Master there, in their midst, alive, but *He was dead* and is now alive.

The disciples would not be able to carry out the mission that God already had for them if they did not have some type of peace. The One standing in their midst in a locked room would be able to do just that.

For the Christian, the peace that Christ offered to His disciples as He walked into that room is the same sustaining peace that provides the ability to carry out the task of evangelism for the believer two thousand years from that day. Peace is not the ability provider, the gift of the Holy Spirit goes hand-in-hand with it; in truth the Holy Spirit is the provider of that peace. It is that peace that would have brought back to mind the words of Christ, in the time after His resurrection, to those disciples. Words such as,

*I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day. **John 6:35-40***

Or a passage that we looked at on Good Friday:

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again This commandment I received from My Father. **John 10:7-18***

It was as He had been saying all along. The disciples had simply never grasped what it was He was talking about (Mk 9:32; Lk 9:45; Jn 12:16) but as John makes clear in his gospel, after Jesus is glorified they finally do (Jn 12:16). By grasping what has happened (something that still takes them several weeks to do) and by being able to experience peace through the sight of Jesus after His resurrection, they are now in the early stages of being prepared to take this message that He has instilled within them during His entire ministry and proclaim it to those who are "sheep, not of this fold." (Jn 10:16)

If we, as believers in Christ, are to undertake evangelism in our spiritual life we must first understand the object of that evangelism: Christ and His Gospel. There is often a tendency to make evangelism about taking care of someone's

physical needs or ministering to some issues that is going on in their lives. All of those issues fall in place behind the message that Christ is God, God who came to earth, and dwelt among His people. It is that He lived a perfect, sinless life. He was betrayed and nailed to a tree so that we, we who were sinful and separated from God can have life. He shed His blood and died, He was buried, but though a stone was in place in front of His tomb, though three days had gone by and the decay had started. Though soldiers had pierced His side and now stood watch at His grave, praise God this morning, He is alive once again. He died in our place and now has risen, through the power of God to offer us life everlasting. He offers us peace. Peace that passes understanding. Peace to carry out His commands. Peace to share His Good News. He has risen and in so doing gives us peace.

Challenge

Jesus had promised His disciples peace. These promises are found in John 14:27 and 16:33. Jesus says He is leaving His peace so *“Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”* (Jn 14:27) He also promises that *“in the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”* (Jn 16:33).

Are these not the two things that prevent evangelism from being a staple in your life? Our hearts are easily troubled and fear abounds with the thought of confronting someone with the sin that separates them from God. Tribulation is a daily reality in the world and from the world and yet in all these things He has overcome. Paul told the church at Rome, for the cause of Christ, life would be difficult and dangerous, *“but in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.”* **Romans 8:37**. This truth should give us peace so that we are able to respond to the call of Christ to be witnesses and make disciples in all nations. (Mt 28:19; Acts 1:8) Our response, in light of the fact of what Christ did on the cross, in light of the fact He has risen today, should be as Isaiah’s was in **Isaiah 6:8**, *“here am I. Send me!”* We leave here today, knowing He is alive. But

we leave here knowing that His life means we live for Him, we share His message and we tell a world that is lost and dying that there is an empty tomb and a savior who has died for them and risen to give them new life. Our lives are to be marked by the sharing of His Gospel. Does yours? It should. Would you pray with me?