

John 20:19-23 - The Three Gifts

Are you afraid? Are you afraid of this world around you? There is a lot of hate for Christians in this world. It is not easy to speak as righteous in Christ. Jesus, the true Jesus, as the scripture 圣经 reveals Him, is offensive (冒犯的, 令人不快的); offensive to the world; even to Christians, because of the sin that continues in them. We need his peace. We need his forgiveness. When we properly reflect him, we are offensive as well. Jesus meets with us today so that we may be bold to proclaim his gospel.

Are you afraid? The disciples (门徒) were afraid. Their Lord is dead as far as they know. They are afraid that the Jews, the priests, scribes (文士) and Pharisees (法利赛人) are coming for them. They came for Jesus; the followers of Jesus are next. But Jesus, having risen from the dead comes to them in the midst of their fear and trembling and encourages them on the very first Lord's Day, the day he arose. Jesus meets with them in order to call them to and encourage them in a new task.

In Christ, we have such a great salvation. He has covered us with his righteousness (义) and he renews us by his Holy Spirit. He has done it all and our Lord continues to work all good things, first through his disciples and by extension to his people here on earth.

The church today continues to labor in that task. In order to fulfill that task, we must continue to come to Jesus for that strength and confidence in declaring the gospel of the forgiveness of sins (赦罪).

I bring you the word of the Lord under the theme: "Go out into the world, bearing gifts."

We will see three gifts that are given to the disciples on this first Lord's Day and are given to you as well.

1. **The disciples are given the peace of Christ.**
2. **The disciples are given the peace of Christ through the comfort of the Holy Spirit.**
3. **The disciples are given the peace of Christ through the comfort of the Holy Spirit, who has the power to forgive sins.**

Do you see the three gifts? "Peace," (平安) "the Holy Spirit," (圣灵) and "the forgiveness of sins." (罪得赦免) In giving these gifts to his apostles (使徒) Christ gives these gifts to His Church.

There is a special task for these disciples. They are to be Apostles of Christ; They are the first wave, the establishing wave of the declaration of Christ's forgiveness. They are the heralds (传令官) of the kingdom.

In our passage these future heralds are huddled together (挤在一起), afraid. They have shut and locked the doors, fearing the continued wrath of the Jews. It's only a couple days after Jesus' death, the Jews could easily come after them. They could come and get rid of the followers of Jesus. The contrast between their fear here and their boldness in the book of Acts, is like the difference between night and day. They are not ready for that bold proclamation, yet. Jesus comes to prepare them.

John emphasizes that this is the first day of the week, the Lord's Day. The first Lord's day, because Christ has been raised up. The church has always understood that by raising himself on this day, the Lord declares this day to be the new special day of the church. The Lord Jesus treats His own day as a special day. He appears among His disciples and functions as a Shepherd or a Pastor to them. He prepares them for going out into the world. In a sense this is a picture of a church service; it is not, but it looks forward to the way in which Christians will celebrate their Lord in the future.

The difference here, Jesus is still on earth, participating in some final preparations before he is exalted to the right hand of the Father. We have something still greater than this. Our Lord is exalted to heaven and when we come to worship Him on the first day of the week, we are spiritually brought up into the throne room of God in order to worship Him there.

Our text says that Jesus comes and stands in the midst of them. Some suggest that Jesus walked through the walls. But we understand from other passages that he has a real body. He can be touched and he can eat and drink. Ultimately we don't know how he got in. The emphasis is on the surprise that he is there; the resurrected Lord is among them; the man they expected to be dead.

His first words, as recorded in John, "Peace be with you." It is the simple greeting of the Jews, which they still use today, *shalom* or peace; this simple greeting receives new significance in the mouth of Jesus. The disciples, they left Jesus to die on the cross; they did not defend him, they did not die with him, but ran from him. Jesus comes and brings them peace. A peace that comes from the cross. It is dark outside. The disciples are full of fear. They huddle behind locked doors. Jesus brings peace. They will form the first community, the first congregation, who will bear His name. He is the perfect man whom death could not keep and now he brings righteousness to His disciples. The peace he brings is one that brings freedom from worry. The disciples may well, feel guilty, complicit (牵连) in Christ's death, because they fled from him in the hour of crisis, but Christ comes and offers them peace.

That peace is rest. The disciples here are the first partakers in a new era of rest (安息). We may know that we have rest in Jesus; that we have eternal life; that we don't need to do anything more to receive eternal life. This peace is the fullness of Sabbath rest that was looked forward to in the Old Testament.

That peace is connected to the declaration of and the withholding of forgiveness, which is given to the apostles at the end of our text. The peace the Christ declares comes with a freedom from sin, a knowledge that one is right with God.

It is not surprising that the early church picked up on this greeting and incorporated it into their liturgy (礼拜仪式). Many churches still use this simple formula today. The service begins with a declaration of peace. When they do so; when we do the same in our Salutation, which offers the blessing and the peace of Jesus to the church, the under-shepherd acts in the place of Jesus, the true Shepherd. Christ through his ministers declares His peace to His people.

Christ goes on to show His resurrected body to His disciples. He shows them Christ crucified; the Christ who still bears the wounds of the cross for our sake. A reminder to us that he did suffer the wrath of God, so that we might have peace and joy. A faithful church will do this every Sunday. Paul identifies himself as the one who preaches Christ crucified. Every Sunday the church comes together and enters the throne room of God. Jesus is no longer on earth, so we go up to heaven, by the Spirit, in order to see our crucified Lord; a resurrected, crucified Lord; a glorified, crucified Lord. We see him through the preaching of the Word, which points us to the salvation, which Jesus offers. We see him through the Lord's Supper, where we have a meal with Him and he fills us for our journey.

Upon this the disciples rejoice. They have their resurrected Lord back. They also begin to understand what the fullness of this peace that Christ speaks of means. They may have fullness of an impossible joy in him. Think on this. When you come and see Christ every week. Are you not comforted? Do you not rejoice in a Lord, who has given you a clean conscience (良心)? You used to be filthy tombs. You used to be enslaved to your own lusts. But, you were washed! You were justified (被称为义)! You were sanctified (使成圣)! You are holy to the Lord your God.

If we follow through with the analogy (类比) that this is a proto-church (早期教会) service, then this first church service focusses on the dismissal. The whole emphasis of this first post-resurrection message is the sending out (差派门徒). After Jesus has demonstrated his resurrection to his disciples; he once again says, "Peace be with You," followed by words of sending out. Go, you have my peace. Just as Paul begins and ends his epistles (书信) with a blessing, so Christ does.

As Christians we all receive the gifts given in this passage, but we use them as God has called us in our various vocations (呼召 , 职业). If you are a plumber (水管工), you are sent out today to plumb righteously, fully obedient to Christ, so that He may shine through you, and so you proclaim God's work in your life. If you are a teacher, you are sent out today to teach righteously and so you proclaim God's work in your life. If you are a farmer, you are sent out today to farm righteously and so you proclaim God's work in your life.

Go then, Congregation of our Lord; you have the gift of peace. You are free from worry, because you have a place in God's kingdom. The disciples had peace, as they approached their task as God's emissaries. You too are called to reflect God's peace. You don't have the same task as the disciples, but each one of you, in the task to which you are called, are to be bearers of the gospel of peace. Both in Word and Deed you are to present in yourselves, the offer of Christ's peace, a freedom from worry, from the guilt of sin, from the cares and the demands of the false gods of this world, to your neighbor. You are the light of the world. Don't hide that light under a basket.

This brings us to our second point...

The disciples are given the peace of Christ through the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Christ sends out a friend and a comforter to his sent out ones. You are not sent out from the Church of God, to do God's will, alone. Rather the Holy Spirit is there to encourage you, both that your sins are forgiven, and that the gospel is there to be offered to your neighbor as well.

Having blessed his disciples with peace, Christ tells them that he sends them out in the same way that he is sent out. We need to be careful not to identify the disciples' special calling with our calling. The disciples are called to be Apostles, Missionary Pastors, for their Lord, and carry the news of forgiveness of sins throughout the known world. We do not have the same calling, the same function within the Body of Christ. The disciples here are specifically called out to carry forth the message of Jesus Christ. The Kingdom has come: forgiveness has come. Even as Christ pointed to the cross; Even as Christ was raised up on that cross to call all men to himself, so the disciples are called to raise up the banner of Christ before the world.

But something deeper is going on here. One of the important themes in John is that Jesus has come to show way to the Father. Even more, He is the exegesis (圣经注释), he explains, he shows the way, to the Father. When you see Jesus you see the Father. This is the whole point of Jesus' long discussion with the disciples in the upper room. He tells them you have seen the Father. Now the disciples are to go out and show the way to Jesus. They are to be the exegesis of Jesus. That is why Jesus prays in John 17, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that the World may believe that you sent me." The way to the Father is shown through Christ, Christ who offers himself up for the sake of the sins of the world. The way to Christ is to be shown through his disciples and through those who believe in the words of His disciples. As Paul might say, "Imitate (效法) me, even as I imitate Christ." The point isn't Paul, the point is the Christ who works through Paul.

Now Jesus gives a gift to the disciples, so that they may have the strength to go out; a gift that he promised them in the upper Room; The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will strengthen them to be powerful apostles for the sake of Christ's kingdom. He symbolizes this with a deep breathe. He is the resurrected Lord. He now has the power to give this gift. The word points us back to Genesis, where God breathes on Adam and Adam receives life. This breathe is a picture of the new life that men now receive through Christ. Christ as the new Adam is beginning again. There is now a new human race in the image of Christ, born from above, as Christ said in John 3.

Jesus says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Jesus keeps His promise that He gave them. This Spirit will bind them to himself. This Spirit will communicate Jesus to the disciples, so that they will continue to have his presence in their lives. This Spirit will work through them to show the world Jesus. This is the first taste of the Spirit. At Pentecost (五旬节), the fullness of the Spirit will be pulled out and the world will see the great power of the spirit. The disciples do really receive the Spirit, but they must wait until the right time; Pentecost, for the fullness of the Spirit, after which they will go out and preach with boldness.

You, congregation of the Lord, you have the Spirit, He is teaching you right now through the Word preached. He is there as a friend and comforter to you. He teaches you that you have forgiveness. He teaches you to practice righteousness. He teaches you to love. More than that through the Spirit, Christ is with you. It is easy to slip into a false understanding of the Spirit, as a force, which works through us in an abstract kind of way, but no, the Spirit is a distinct person, who is wrestling (摔跤, 较力) with you, with your heart so that you may have confidence to show Christ to the world. He wrestles with you and he prays for you and he teaches you to do good works.

Go out today, a new creation, knowing that you have the gift of the Spirit. He communicates to you the peace of Christ. He works through you, for you are His instrument. Though we are not all called to be preachers and teachers as the disciples in this room are, we are all called to put on Christ. We are all called to imitate Christ. Through our imitation, through our trust, through our demonstration of love, the Spirit demonstrates to the world the love and mercy of our Lord. We show our love through sacrifice. Who gives us courage? The Spirit, by teaching us through the Word, by showing us Jesus' love for us; by showing us the Father's love and care. Therefore; live the gospel of Christ, speak the Gospel of Christ.

This brings us to our third point...

The disciples are given the peace of Christ through the comfort to the Holy Spirit who has the power to forgive sins.

What do all these gifts come to? What is their end? That the church should declare forgiveness of sins to the very end of the world. We have the joy of declaring this gospel to the World. Christ won. Christ has been raised up on the cross and so he has conquered the power of sin. He has taken the sins of the World on Himself. John the Baptist declared, pointing at Jesus, "The Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the World." Now the disciples are sent out, preaching, to point to the cross and say the same thing, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World."

The disciples here are called to a special calling. They are to dedicate their lives to the preaching of this Gospel, "Christ died and He rose again," "Christ offers you forgiveness of sins, if you trust in His sacrifice."

Christ gives them the spirit so that, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." Forgiveness of sins belongs to the church, as the body of Christ. The Disciples of Christ are to proclaim this forgiveness to the world. The receive peace, they receive the Spirit, so that they may go out and proclaim the forgiveness of sins. This doesn't mean you can go out and indiscriminately (不加分别地) tell someone that they have forgiveness of sins. Rather you tell them, that to believe in Christ and you follow this by joining the body of Christ, you have forgiveness. Peter tells the crowds in Acts 2. Believe; that is, trust in Christ; and be baptized; that is, be joined to his body; and you will be saved.

The church, as a mother to the saints, accepts believers and joins them to herself and rejects those who apostatize (叛教), cutting them off from herself. Ultimately this happens through the preaching of the word; the word that points to our crucified Lord, and offers the blood, which he shed on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. It is in preaching that this happens first and foremost. It is in the preaching of the word that the disciples and the ministers of the word today have this power. The Spirit works by this word to convict the hearts of the hearers.

If you are a hypocrite (假冒伪善者) you can't count on being part of the church, for your salvation, because first and foremost you reject the preaching of the word every Sunday. You have denied Christ in your heart and so you have cut off yourself from church already in your heart. Therefore believe this good news. Christ has given you forgiveness. Live it out so that your neighbor may see your good works and glorify God

This works itself out in church discipline (管教, 纪律). The members of the church, see a man or woman, who is clearly not living out the gospel; living in a way so that they are not maturing, but rather denying the gospel of Christ. They call that person back by visiting them. By reminding them of the forgiveness of sin and the new life they have in Christ.

This works itself in your daily witness. When you say, "I live, because Christ lives in me." When you say, "I can be a friend of God, because of the work Jesus Christ did for me."

All of you are called to show the love of Christ your neighbor. You are called to be a witness to Christ, to show Christ through word and deed. Christ not only died for you and rose again, but he equips each one of you to go out and bear His name.

You all know that there is a great mass of humanity out there that does not know the love of Jesus or the forgiveness of sins. My hope for you is that you will receive confidence from these words of Christ; from these gifts of Christ and so you will go out, and the Spirit will lead you, so that you will rejoice and delight in repeating the words of life to those whom Christ brings into your life. My hope is that you will receive an unshakeable (不动摇的) confidence in your Lord through the gifts he offers here, in this passage. My hope is that you will go out boldly this week, bearing Christ's name.

Every Christian is anointed in Christ as prophet, priest and king. The church, the bride of Christ, is entrusted with these gifts, "Peace," "the Spirit," and "The forgiveness of sins," and much more that John isn't even talking about over here. You, within the vocation God has called you to, are also to go out.

Don't be afraid. The world hates, but they can do nothing to your eternal salvation that you have Christ. On this earth, every Sunday is a renewal; a new preparation for a new going out. You have witnessed Christ crucified in the preaching of the word. You no longer belong to this world, but you belong to heaven. You may be fearless. Christ has declared that you have His peace. Christ has fed you today with his Spirit, Christ has given you forgiveness of sins. Don't be afraid.

Therefore Go! Into the world, bearing these gifts.