

1 May 2011, Easter 2

## **SENT**

### **John 20:21-23**

*Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

#### **Bread, Milk and the CourierMail**

Little Jilly was sent to the corner shop with these instructions: "Here's \$20.00. I want you to buy a loaf of bread, a bottle of milk and a CourierMail. You can also buy yourself an iceblock. But I want some change back from that \$20.00!"

So off went Jilly to the shop, singing to herself "Bread, milk, and CourierMail" over and over. That is, until she got closer to the shop, then her song changed to "Paddlepop, Drumstick, or Have-a-heart" over and over. By the time she got to the shop, all she could remember of what her mother told her was, "You can buy yourself an iceblock."

So she came home with bacon instead of bread, Milo instead of milk, and the Chronicle instead of the CourierMail; and, of course, an icecream. At least she remembered something!

Christ has given us very simple instructions, too. We are sent to bring the Good News of God's forgiveness to everyone. And we are sent with something to give away, not to buy.

#### **Peace**

In fact, our task is to bring God's peace into the world.

Can you imagine anything more needed in people's lives than peace -true peace that lasts for ever? People seem to be able to bear up under all sorts of pain and illnesses and hardships. But where there is no peace in their lives - fighting within the marriage, disputes at work, the nation in civil strife, or whatever- then that light of life we usually see in people grows dim. You can see that dimness in refugees: they appear listless. Or you can see it in people

who are chewed up inside over some sort of strife in their lives: they almost look like ‘the living dead’, and feel that way too!

Jesus said to his disciples, “Peace be with you!”

And they needed his peace! They thought he was dead. Now it looked like they were being visited by his ghost.

But Jesus meant more than just calm when he said “Peace be with you.” He also meant that they now have peace with God. The old rebellion of Adam and Eve back before time began, and all the estrangement from God with all its disobedience, disease and death have come to an end. Because Jesus is alive, there is peace.

And note that truth: It is only because Jesus is alive again that there can be peace. When someone we love has died, there is very little peace in our lives. But imagine what it would be like if that person came alive again; and not worn out from disease as we saw them the last moment before they died, but full of health and life. We’d have a peace with life that is full of joy!

Jesus is alive again. And joy and celebration filled the hearts and lives of the disciples. From the fear of death came the joyful peace of Christ.

It is this peace that Jesus gives his disciples, and sends them out with it into the world. And it is a peace that is full of rejoicing and celebration and life.

## **Sent**

Wherever we go, with whomever we meet, we bring God’s peace into that situation. We are God’s ambassadors. Our task is far more than an errand to the corner shop! We have been sent: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

To put it perhaps too simply: Wherever we are, God is; just as wherever Jesus went, God was. Of course, we aren’t God; but we do stand in the place of God in this world. It is Jesus’ plan that people get to know him and are reconciled with God through us, his ambassadors.

What a great honour we are given. But also what a great responsibility. How can we carry out such a task?

## **The Breath of God**

The truth is, we don't do it on our own. We have Jesus' Breath with us, his Holy Spirit: *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*

Imagine it! We have Christ's Spirit dwelling in us -the breath of Jesus!

It is Jesus' Breath that sets our hearts on fire when we hear the Gospel and lifts our spirits when we hear of Jesus' love. Ever felt like that when reading the Bible or hearing a sermon?

It is Jesus' Breath that moves our conscience to help or give that little bit more for someone or some cause, when we feel that we have done enough. Or to care from simple things, like giving a cup of water, to big things like round-the-clock caring for an ill relative.

It is Jesus' Breath that can suddenly sweep over us a wonderful calm -the surety that all will be well- when so much seems to be in turmoil or going wrong.

It is Jesus' Breath that leads us to speak for him, and surprises us with how powerful and fruitful our attempts to speak for him can be. And I am always surprised by this one. We say what we can, and often without much wisdom or learning. Yet, so long as we speak God's truth, God does mighty things.

In essence, it is Jesus' Breath that enables us to do anything in his name. St Paul wrote: *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.* [1 Corinthians 15:10 ]

## **Forgive/unforgive**

But most of all, it is Jesus' breath that enables us to be ministers of his forgiveness: If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.

Many people don't really understand why forgiveness is so important. And that's because they don't really understand what sin is. Sin is more than just being naughty, or disobedient. Sin is in essence the sort of self-centredness that wrecks relationships with God, other people and the world in general.

Forgiveness, on the other hand, is about restoring good relationships. The Bible writers also used the words reconciliation, or atonement, or justification for forgiveness: to be united again, to be at one, to be just right with each other.

Forgiveness is really the beginning of peace.

Christ has given us the ministry of forgiveness.

But be clear about how we do this ministry.

We don't go around simply saying: "You're forgiven", or "You're damned to hell". We are to speak the truth in love. As St Paul says: *Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, if you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.* [Galatians 6:1]

So in all sorts of ways we act as servants who bring God's gift of forgiveness. We have our worship services where we confess our sins and hear God's gift of forgiveness. There is Baptism and Holy Communion. Pastors and other Christians are often involved in counselling troubled souls; and often that is not by formal counselling, but by quiet conversation.

Even what we do can be a witness to God's forgiveness: how we help others, how we treat people, the attitudes we show about people -no matter the colour of their skin, or the language they speak, or how rich or healthy they are; in short, how we show that we regard other people as those for whom Christ died also, and wills that they also be his brothers and sisters. Since forgiveness is about being one with God and people, these actions are God's forgiveness in action -his will to be one with all people.

Of course, there are those who reject God's forgiveness, and will have nothing to do with being reconciled with anyone, let alone God. We must point out them the deadly peril their life is in. But there are no set formulas for doing this. May God grant us the wisdom to say what needs to be said, but in the most loving way!

I'll say the point again: we are servants who bring God's forgiveness to people. What a wonderful thing to do! Last Sunday lots of children, young and old, were excited about what Easter eggs they might find. We have the best Easter gift of all to give, and we can give it all year round.

Amen.