

What's Next
John 20:19-23

Today we have plenty of bulletins. Today you are not scrunched in with the person next to you. In other words, today is not Easter.

To be sure, there is something powerful and compelling about the Easter message that we do not want to forget. Defeat turned into victory, death to life. Even children, see beyond Easter bunny and egg hunts and know the truth, even if the truth is expressed in some unique ways.

I was told that five-year old Jacob described Easter like this: Jesus died and was put in a tomb. But then an angel came and said, "Jesus, wake up, you're alive."

And that's what happened, or at least something like that.

But now what? If last week we celebrated Easter, today I want to talk about how we respond to Easter. What does the risen Lord expect from you, from me?

The disciples were wondering that themselves. Waiting for what would come next. Who are we, who are we to be, what are we to do, now that Jesus is alive?

One difficulty they faced was that Jesus' being raised from the dead had not magically made their problems disappear. As you remember, one reason they had run off when Jesus was arrested was that they, too were at

risk for arrest.

They are sitting behind closed doors, locked doors. Fear and treachery have imprisoned them.

But now what? Jesus is alive and old boundaries no longer apply. Jesus' simply appears through the walls. This is Resurrection power. That whatever holds us back, whatever world or devil or past seeks to bind us no longer matters. Jesus sets us free.

And when Jesus comes to us, he comes first as one who brings comfort. Peace be with you. We live confident lives because we know Jesus is with us, Jesus loves us. . . even when we do not deserve it.

But make no mistake: On Easter the message is not just one of comfort, it is also a message of challenge.

Folks, you and I, the church, must take to heart what the Risen Lord says when he casts boundaries aside and appears to us just where we are: *As the father has sent me, so I send you.*

We live in what is called a post-modern world. Traditional Christian doctrine is questioned or ignored. We wonder about how much of the Bible is to be taken literally, what is meant symbolically, and how do we tell the difference?

In the secular world, science no longer has the authority it did a few years ago. We thought science could heal all wounds, but now we have germs that antibiotics cannot touch. We thought technology would solve all problems, but war and hunger persist. We trusted economists to tweak interest rates so that our economy

would grow, interest rates would be low, and prosperity would be in our grasp. Well, we see how well THAT'S working out.

But the good news is, many people are beginning to look again for spiritual truth. And this is where we come in. As God has sent Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord, so now Jesus is sending you and sending me.

What now after Easter? We have a new calling: to be the messengers, and more than messengers, the embodiment of all Christ stands for.

After Easter Jesus will not let us rest easy behind locked doors. There are people to be fed, and clothed, there are lives to be mended and transformed. And he is counting on us.

Do not be fooled. Sometimes we excuse ourselves from acting because we think we can't make that big of a difference anyway. But if we believe Easter is real, if we believe in the power of God to make new and to transform, then we believe that what we do, how we live, indeed makes a difference.

A prep school chaplain who took the time to throw a football around with a sad and lonely homesick freshman far from home, set that boy on a path to faith, and eventually to the ordained ministry, and for better or worse, that boy is now an ancient 56 year old and pastor of Ann Street UMC.

A kindergarten teacher spoke to her class of slavery and a war that ended slavery, and set my son on his path; he loves history, more than that, he is accepting and welcoming of other races.

Whatever ministry you do, whatever act of kindness you perform in Jesus' name, whatever attitude you pass on to your children in Jesus' name has eternal consequences. You know, it is fair for you to ask a pastor about his calling to the ministry, but then it is also fair for the pastor to ask you about yours. . . . Because this passage in John tells us we are all called to minister in Jesus' power.

Jesus comes to us to comfort us, but then sends us, all of us, forth as a witness to his love, his transforming power.

And, although this is not all there is to our faith, central to it is this notion of forgiveness. We are called to be people who will occasionally turn the other cheek, who will not escalate conflicts in our homes, our neighborhoods, our community. We are called to be people who work for understanding with those who disagree with us, and with folks we simply cannot stand.

To folks in a world in which they seem lost, we are to show and tell and embody and bear witness to, that whatever their past, God gives them a new future. Their past is forgiven on the cross, and new paths are made possible by Resurrection.

What next? We are sent.

So, here we have it. Easter is here, but we feel locked in place. But then Jesus is with us. To offer us peace; we are his, no matter what we have done. And he comes to us to send us forth in his name, his power, his attitude, to change the world. To remind the world of forgiveness and new beginnings.

And, in the midst of all this, Jesus does something strange. He breathes on the disciples. On us. It doesn't make sense, until we remember that word for breath and Spirit are the same. Jesus breathes on them as a promise that the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Jesus himself, is given to them, and to us.

As God breathed on Adam and made him alive, so Jesus breathes on us and makes us alive in a new way, alive to Christ, alive to the Spirit of Christ, alive to the new direction he has for your life and my life.

What next after Easter? In Spirit Jesus is with us, in Spirit, Jesus sends us forth from these walls. In Spirit, we have the promise not just of God's acceptance, but God's guidance, and God's command.

Last Sunday was a day to celebrate. But what's next? Today is a day for us to get busy. So, wake up! Jesus is alive, and in Jesus' power and spirit, we have a church, a community, and world, to transform. And that's what's next after Easter. Amen.