

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

For the disciples, the time period after the crucifixion and death of Jesus on that first Good Friday until the very next Sunday evening was a time of tremendous fear, deep grief, and then utter confusion. Sunday morning Mary Magdalene told a story to the disciples too great to believe. Listen to what Luke writes about the disciples' reaction to the eyewitness testimony of Mary Magdalene seeing Jesus alive. **Luke 24:11(NIV)** *"But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense."* Jesus chose first to appear to a woman who became the first evangelist to tell the story of the risen Savior.

Why did the men not believe the word of an eyewitness? Here are a few thoughts. When you are in deep grief it changes your perception of things. When you are in deep grief it is as if the world stops for a time. Everyone else is living their lives but yours has stopped. The pain is heart wrenching, the deepest of emotional pain you will ever experience. How can someone you love so deeply be gone? Letting go of a person that means so much to you is so hard. Jesus' tortuous death came all too soon. On Thursday night Jesus and the band of 12 enjoyed a great supper together and by 9:00 on Friday morning, Jesus was hanging on a cross. All of the disciples fled for their lives except John. John was the only disciple at the foot of the cross. The eyewitness report of the risen Savior was unbelievable and so they did not believe.

Huddled in fear that Sunday evening, more than likely the 10 disciples were awaiting Roman soldiers to come and take them and put them to death as the soldiers had done to Jesus. Every sound they heard outside of the room was magnified by their own sense of terror. The sound of a withered leaf blowing in the wind can paralyze you with fear. Overwhelming grief at the death of Jesus, paralyzing fear wondering when the soldiers will come and take them and mix with that the crazy testimonies of people claiming to see Jesus alive. Mary Magdalene and the two men waking to Emmaus were all too much. The 10 disciples locked themselves into the upper room. Judas had killed himself and Thomas chose not to be with the disciples in

the upper room; his hideout was elsewhere. There are those who like to grieve alone and that is understandable. Thomas loved Jesus. Sometime before when Jesus wanted to return near Jerusalem, Thomas was willing to go there even if it meant dying with Christ. The people where Jesus wanted to go had already threatened to kill Jesus after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead.

Suddenly something startling happened. Jesus appeared in the room, but the door never opened. There Jesus was standing looking at the disciples and they looked at him like they were seeing a ghost. Jesus' resurrected glorified body was able to pass through the walls without an opening. Talk about a surprise! The first words Jesus speaks to them are, "Peace be with you." Yes, that was a common greeting at the time of Jesus, but I am certain Jesus said this for He was assuring the men of who He was and attempting to calm their fears. When Jesus said on the cross "It is finished" that meant they could now be at peace with God and have the peace of God. **Luke 24:39(NIV)** *"Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."* I like the way the New Living translation puts it. **Luke 24:39(NLT)** *Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do."*

When Jesus comes again our spirits will be reunited with a glorified body. Jesus asks the disciples for something to eat, and they gave him some food. In our glorified bodies we too will eat. God promises us a huge feast at the second coming of Jesus (Isaiah 25). Holy Communion is but a foretaste of the feast to come. It will be a glorious event and a meal similar to a wedding reception where everyone is ecstatic with the union for we will be fully united to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The body of believers in Jesus Christ will truly enjoy one another's company. There will not be any person in heaven that you will try to avoid for there will be no more sin in our lives and our relationships one with another will be delightful. Those Christians

that were a constant irritant to you here will be like porcupines without needles. You will be able to get close to that person, love that person genuinely, and be thrilled to see them. No more needling and no more being needled.

The disciples realized it truly was Jesus and their fear subsided and they rejoiced together in the presence of Jesus. Jesus gave them their marching orders or as others put it, the Great Commission found in the Gospel of John. "As the Father has sent me, so send I you" (John 20:21). These words are quite similar to the calling of Isaiah. Jesus is calling the disciples to spend the rest of their lives testifying of their risen Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. They were not to return to their former lives but to go everywhere and teach others what Jesus had taught them. Jesus appeared to them to send them out.

Jesus expects them to live and speak the faith. Jesus promises to give them the power and the ability to do it. Jesus breathed on them and told them to receive the Holy Spirit. Just exactly what happened at that moment is speculation on our part. But I will say Jesus promised to send to them the Holy Spirit after He would ascend into heaven. He would not leave the disciples comfortless but would send the Helper who would always be with them and in them. Jesus had to leave so the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the church could begin. Of course, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised occurred on Pentecost as the church caught fire so to speak, the fire of God's Holy Spirit.

I totally believe when we leave church we too are being sent out by Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit to testify of our risen Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. The mission field is right outside of this church. Your mission field is your neighborhood, your place of employment, your school, and more. We have been empowered by God to speak the Gospel, to live the Gospel message, and to share our faith with the spiritual gifts that God has given to us within the context of our own personalities but learning how to do this and doing it takes being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that prompts us to speak up and

the Holy Spirit can prompt us to be quiet. Sadly, I think we are quiet when the Holy Spirit is prodding us to speak up. We have nothing to be ashamed of when it comes to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This week I was reminded of the inner prompting I had to speak to a particular person about Jesus. For three years I felt the tug of the Holy Spirit inside of me to stop my car, get out, and pray with this public servant. For three years I suppressed that inner prompting. This man took his life leaving behind a beautiful wife and three very young children. Since that moment I do my best to respond to those quiet inner promptings of God to speak and pray when so prompted.

Christ sends us out every day with the power of the Holy Spirit to be Christian witnesses of our risen Lord and Savior. The tomb is empty, and we have a message worth giving but unless we live it and speak it, people will not come to Christ. Paul writes, **Romans 10:14-15(NLT)** *But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!"* God sends us out every week with a call, with a job, with marching orders to speak up and spread the Good News that will save the hearers. **Romans 10:8-10(NIV)** *But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

There is a young person in this church who enjoys inviting people to church and guess what, they come and enjoy themselves. There is life here. We have the words of eternal life and there is nothing better. We have so many here who are on fire for Christ, and we want everyone here on fire for Christ. The tomb is empty. We have a story to tell that leads to

eternal life. God is sending us out this very day and He has given to us the Holy Spirit to do so. *“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”* (Romans 10:13).

Jesus sends the disciples out. Jesus calls the disciples out. “Leave your fear behind and get out of this room for you have Good News to give to all. And Jesus gives to them the message to give, and it is a message of forgiveness of sins. Jesus died on the cross so we can be forgiven of all of our sins. Jesus died on the cross so we can be at peace with God and have the peace of God within. Jesus enters the room. He proves that He is not a ghost. He speaks to them of peace. He calls them out and speaks of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and gives them a little taste of that before Pentecost. Jesus gives them the core of the message.

John 20:21-23(NIV) 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 or her sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”*

Please understand what I am about to say. Only God can forgive sins. Forgiveness is only through Jesus Christ. Our calling, our being sent by God is to proclaim the forgiveness of sins through Jesus. We have the Good News of forgiveness. We have a Person, namely Jesus, to give all of our guilt and shame and sorrows and griefs to. Jesus has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. The most important part of life is being in relationship with Jesus Christ and experiencing the forgiveness of sins, the gift of eternal. Nothing is more important than the message Christ has given to us to give away. We have a message of peace, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and God has given to us the Holy Spirit to embolden us to speak it out unashamedly. This is what happened in the upper room that first Sunday evening, the day of Christ’s resurrection.

Eight days later Jesus reappears to the disciples. Only this time Thomas is present. Some think Jesus reappeared just for the sake of Thomas. Upon seeing, Thomas believes.

Thomas makes the boldest statement of belief out of all the Apostles. Thomas said, “My Lord and my God. The word translated as “Lord” here is the same word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament for God’s high name “Yahweh”. Thomas confessed that Jesus was Yahweh. Here is God, standing before him in the flesh (RC Sproul, John, pg. 393). Notice Jesus did not correct Thomas. Jesus accepted the fact that Thomas called Him God because that is who He truly is, Jesus is fully God and fully man. Amen and Amen.