

## **A Commentary on John 20:19-31**

### **As the Father Has Sent Me, So I Send You**

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I want to suggest that four words – Appeared, Blessed, Equipped, and Sent - represent a kind of summary of this Gospel in general as well as this post-resurrection story found in John 20, verses 19 through 31.

Here we find the disciples huddled in fear. Having been associated with Jesus they were afraid that that which had been visited upon Jesus might likewise be visited upon them. Because of their association with Jesus, the same forces that killed him might come for them as well. So, they are behind closed doors, hiding if you will in fear.

But then Jesus suddenly appears. And when Jesus shows up, he blesses them and he seeks to comfort them and relieve their fears. He speaks a greeting to them that is common to him: Peace be with you, he says. He says it not once, but twice. Peace be with you.

This is no throw-away line. This is no auto-greeting such as we might say: How you doing? – or maybe – What's up? This is Jesus not only saying but, in fact, dispensing, giving away, infusing, creating and insisting upon peace. The word he would have used would have been the Hebrew word 'Shalom' which means not only an absence of violence or strife in your life, but may you have and know complete well-being.

Peace be with you.

And then we have a commissioning. We might notice that there is a kind of parallel in this story between the commissioning of the disciples for the work that they are being given to do and our own commissioning, through our baptism, for the work we have been given to do. That is, we, as were the disciples, are given the gift of the Holy Spirit moving into and over our lives. The Holy Spirit not only calls but equips and empowers. The text says that Jesus breathed on them and they received the Holy Spirit. That same Spirit speaks to and guides us – if we will but have it.

Immediately after showing up and offering his blessing, Jesus says to those gathered: As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Whoa! What an amazing thing. Jesus is saying: I am leaving. I have to go now. So now, I want YOU; I need YOU, to take my place. I need YOU to continue what I have begun.

A few chapters back in this very same Gospel Jesus says to his disciples: Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do, in fact, will do greater works than these.... (14:12).

Now, I don't know about you dear reader, but I can quite imagine that, like me, you find that a pretty daunting sounding task – to take Jesus' place; to be an ambassador for Christ. Those are some pretty big sandals to fill – to say the least. But that is what is being asked of us.

But with that said, if we are being commissioned, “sent out” as it were, we might be forgiven for asking just what is it that I am being sent to do? What is my job description? What is this job description that no less than Jesus has assigned to me?

Now, obviously I don't know what it is in the particulars that you, dear are called to but I do know what, in the broad sense what Christ was calling us to when he said, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” In short, he calls us to be purveyors and practitioners of love. When as Christians we get this, hear this, understand this – we are well on our way to being a mature and authentic member of the Jesus Movement.

Christ knew very well that when we love, that love is not always received. He knew very well that the world will tend to think that loving as Jesus loved is a little bit crazy. Not practical in the real world. And some will not be able to accept that loving as Jesus loved expects nothing in return and they may well be suspicious of you – just as they were suspicious of Jesus. But yet it is as a practitioner of love to which each of us is called. Each of us is called to be guided by love, motivated by love, and to be extenders of love - regardless. That is the assignment. That is our calling. This is the work we have been given to do.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

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I end this piece with a story I ran across recently. It involved one Michael Trice who reported on a visit he had made to the National Palatine Museum in Rome. There he says among other amazing historical documents, two in particular commanded his attention. The two documents were displayed side-by-side. One of the documents was the colorful words that welcomed the attendees to the Second Vatican Council. You will recall that both the First and Second Vatican Councils were the Roman Catholic Church's attempt to grapple with modernity; to re-connect the church to modern or contemporary life. In other words the councils were talking about reforming the church, both theologically as well as practically. The point is these two councils were hugely important. The products of those councils significantly altered the reality and vision of the Roman Church. So this document welcoming these priests and theologians is a very important historical document in its own right. That was one of the documents that greeted our friend Michael Trice and all visitors to the National Palestine Museum.

The other, right beside it, was the papal bull ordering the excommunication of Martin Luther – a monk who had persisted in being a pain in the neck of the Catholic hierarchy. He was an advocate for reform and he just would not shut up about it. One might say that Luther paid the price for igniting the reformation movement that, in some measure, would eventually lead to these two councils.

And our visitor, Michael, said that he kept coming back to this particular display and he said that all at once, it was as if the spirit of our current age ascended from the thin space between these two documents. We are travelers he thought... and the tribulations of our past teach us that our true destination is to make every effort for deeper fellowship with family, friend, neighbor, stranger and enemy alike. This destination is our only true home [*Sightings, Nov. 7, 2013*].

I would say that's a pretty good summary of who and what Christ was calling us to when he said, "As the Father sent me, so I now send you."

Amen

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