

2nd Sunday of Easter
John 20:19-23
Jesus' first order of business

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Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Today I'm proclaiming God's good news to you from John chapter 20 where the risen Jesus first meets with his disciples after his crucifixion.

The theme is *Jesus' first order of business...*

If you have your Bible's handy it will be helpful for you to turn to John 20:19-23 to follow along as I go through these verses.

Let's pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock, our redeemer, our risen Jesus Christ. Amen.

At some point in the future our world will spring back into life. Sporting teams will start playing. Chefs will fire up their kitchens and send out meals to hungry diners. WASO will hold a concert.

Their first order of business will tell you a lot about what they stand for.

Sporting teams will want a win.

Chefs will want to delight the taste buds.

WASO will want to bring music to your ears.

Have you ever thought about the Gospel we just heard as Jesus first order of business?

There Jesus was having fulfilled his mission.

He is about to meet with his disciples.

It's not going to be just any old moment, is it?

What he does is going to say a lot about what it all means.

These days we might call it the pinnacle of his narrative.

Or the core of his message.

But either way, what Jesus does there is going to be pretty helpful for telling us what really *really* matters to him.

So with that in mind let's take a look at what he really wanted us to know about him.

Verse 19 says:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

What matters here is that Jesus wants to meet his disciples on the day he has risen.

He is keen!

He also wants to show something about his resurrection body.

The text gives us the impression that he didn't knock on the door.

No – his resurrection body is different to his old one.

Still a body – but now he is not bound by space and matter like he seemed to be before.

Then there is his standing amongst his disciples.

Jesus wants to be near.

In one of Matthew's post-resurrection appearances Jesus makes this pretty clear to us: 'And surely I am with you to the very end of the age' (Matthew 28:20).

And what about his opening words:

Peace be with you!

Or as the Hebrew puts it: Shalom lechem.

This is no ordinary greeting.

These are his disciples who deserted him and lied to protect themselves.

They have sinned against him – and Jesus being God, directly against God.

Seeing him would have evoked shame.

Yet we know Shalom means 'Peace, wholeness, wellness, deliverance'.

Peace with God, healing so you can be whole, be delivered from your guilt and leave your shame behind.

Going on his first words, Jesus' first order of business is obviously complete restoration into a full relationship with him.
I don't want to move on – that is staggeringly beautiful.
But we have four other verses.

Verse 20 says:

'After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord'.

The showing of his hands and side is thought to be part of him making it really clear that he is not a ghost.

He really is alive.

The eye up close can tell.

And they all knew how he died.

He has the distinguishing signs of crucifixion including the spear wound to the side that other victims of that torture that day didn't have.

So he is making sure they know it's him.

This is vital of the subsequent mission they will have as their whole message will hinge on the crucified Jesus risen from the dead.

Jesus already knows that St Paul – not in the room yet as not an apostle yet – will get it right when the Holy Spirit inspires him to write:

'If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile... if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all people' (1 Corinthians 15: 17,19).

I conclude that Jesus wants to make sure they really know he is real living flesh and blood.

The combination of his peaceful assurance to greet them and his showing off his wounds must have been gentle because we are told the disciples are filled with joy.

They get it!

They know what's happened.

They are at peace with God who stands before them.

Jesus said to them the night before he died that:

"You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices...

(referring to the gloating of the religious leaders and the crowd that had crucified hm)

... You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy!" (John 16:20)

Here that joy now is!!!

Jesus keeps his promises.

Also, it's clear Jesus wants his disciples to be in a place where they rejoice over what he done for them.

The text continues:

'Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you!" (John 20:21)

You might think that Jesus is being a little repetitive with the peace thing here.

Is too much of his good thing ever enough in such an unpeaceful life?

Yet even as it is the case, it seems that the first peace was for the people in the room that night.

This second one is for the those he wants to reach through their efforts.

So that would include you and me.

The disciples will be the conduit of the peace.

It will spread out across countries.

And will be handed down over time.

Till it meets us here in Perth Australia, even during lockdown!

Peace.

Wholeness.

Wellness.

Deliverance.

This night that Jesus resurrected from the dead he really wanted to give us here this message as well.

And just as he was sent by the Father, now he sends his disciples.

Which his body the church has been doing ever since... till once again it finds us here.

Yet the words 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you' surely don't just stop with us.

We are important!

But not the end of the line!

That sending is something we also are sent to do!

In our different ways – me as pastor, you in your vocations, but all of us nonetheless.

Which brings us to verse 22:

‘And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit”

Jesus first order of business included equipping ***with God himself*** his disciples for this sent task!

As one of my favourite commentator’s says, and I’ve said to you before “The only way the disciples could have missed receiving Jesus gift this evening would have been by ducking when Jesus breathed on them’ (Bruner: 1164).

For Jesus it was the highest priority for his disciples to be **equipped** with his Spirit for the ‘sent task’ ahead of them.

It still is.

You first received it at baptism.

But there are many outpourings of the spirit.

Word and sacrament are the means of Spirit.

You received countless outpourings of the Holy Spirit as you have received the gifts of Christ’s forgiveness and his body and blood over your Christian lives.

Yet this is not just a gift for us.

Just like our God-given gifts and talents are not something we are meant to keep to ourselves.

This gift of forgiveness is to be shared.

This is where the final verse comes in.

“If you forgive anyone their sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (John 20:23)

A few things here.

As a first order of business Jesus is showing the forgiveness of sins is what he is all about.

Know the forgiveness of sins and know Jesus.

Ponder that a bit.

Forgiveness is Jesus’ – God’s – first order of business.

Risen from the dead the first thing he does is proclaim his forgiving 'making-whole' peace.

And hot on its heels he tells his disciples to take it out to the world.

Which brings us to that last line: 'If you do not forgive them, then they are not forgiven'.

It's not that Jesus is inviting us to arbitrarily withhold forgiveness.

It's not ours to withhold.

Jesus wants his death to be good for everybody.

But when people refuse to repent or continue in their unbelief then it dishonors Jesus if we pretend all is ok.

As much as it goes against the popular grain – we can't have any fire and brimstone preaching – there really are opposite sides to believing.

The Australian Lutheran College graduate in me finds it interesting that Jesus ends his post resurrection speech on a note of severe warning and judgement.

I was taught never to do that in sermons.

(Jesus must have missed that course!)

End with the Gospel we were told (and for good reason as people need to be lifted and encouraged given this is the only place in the world they hear this beautiful gospel message).

But here Jesus really wants us to know to know that where people are not repentant they will suffer.

He put it this way in John 3:

'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them' (John 3:38).

The thing for us is to communicate this with great patience and gentle instruction (2 Timothy 4:2b).

One of the ways I do that is focus heavily on the forgiveness part in order to make the opposite case as well.

For the opposite case ends up speaking for itself where the benefits of belief are laid out so clearly.

How to pitch the message varies from person to person.

And people do reject God (Luke 16:30-31 makes this clear).

When they do I don't try to match wits.

That never works and that's not what this is about at all.

But I do listen well.

How else will I know how to respond?

Now... I never find this straightforward and I know you don't either. That's why he has given us his Holy Spirit for the task – he knew we'd need it.

But Jesus does want the world to know both sides.

God's wrath is what he bore so that the human race wouldn't have to. Jesus really does want to save us from it – as he showed on Calvary's cross.

I leave this last part of Jesus' resurrection address there.

I sum up by commending to you these five verses as Jesus' first order of business for us.

Wholeness.

Proof of his physical resurrection.

Joy.

Peace for the world.

A job for us to do.

The Spirit to help us in EVERYTHING.

And a message of forgiveness for those who believe.

That's Jesus' first order of business for his disciples – that is why we should keep it ours.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.