

**I am Sending You**

- I. **To proclaim peace**
- II. **With the keys of the kingdom**

In 2008 Nebraska lawmakers passed a law that allowed unwanted infants to be left at hospitals without penalty, but it lacked an age restriction. This meant that parents could abandon their unruly teenagers and leave them in state custody. One parent left nine of his 10 children after his wife died; other parents have dropped off children with behavioral problems. Critics say the state is missing the root of the problem in failing to help struggling parents.

Without judging these parents, not knowing their circumstances....and whether they had unruly teenagers or not, wouldn't you as a parent feel remorse, and have to ask yourself, "How could I do this to my child?"

Could these possibly be the same thoughts that ran through the minds of the disciples on the first Easter Sunday? "How could we have done this to our Teacher, our friend, our Jesus?" In the garden they had abandoned him when he needed them to watch and pray. Instead they were caught snoozing. In the garden they knew they should have stayed with him, but ran away instead, and went and hid. And Peter, bold Peter, eating his words... how sour they must have tasted as he realized his denial of his Christ! Do you think they may have felt an overwhelming sense of guilt?

And then add to it the confusion that swirled around them. Here they were on Sunday, huddled together in a house, with the doors locked, three days after his death, trying to make sense of why some of the women in their group had said they had seen him alive that morning. Why had Peter and two travelers from Emmaus claimed they had spoken with him? And then reports from the soldiers who had guarded the tomb, accusing them of stealing his body? Well, that they hadn't done, but abandon their Savior they did, at the most critical point in his life, at his death.

We may not have abandoned our children, or even thought about such things, but as children of God, have we run from our Savior as the disciples did? Just as the soldiers surrounded disciples in the garden on that Thursday evening, so even the difficulties of life surround me, the unknown future in regards to finances, career health and relationships... and when I show anxiety and fear, I abandon Jesus. I'm not trusting in his promises. Do I abandon Jesus when I sit in front of the TV or my laptop and allow my browser or channel surfing to go places it ought not to? Do I abandon Jesus when I sit down and figure out my monthly budget? Do I abandon his Word when I sit down and plan my weekly calendar? Or maybe I become frustrated when my life doesn't go as I planned or hoped, disaster or death changes life and then I feel Jesus has abandoned me. So I leave him and his Word in worship and Bible study. How well does that work? Do I find what I'm looking for? Do I have peace with myself and with others? More importantly, is there peace with God, in my relationship with him? Not if he looks only at my life and how I so often abandon him. In my sin there is no peace, but only animosity and war between us and God.

Why do I abandon him? I forget his promises. Why? Because I'm not in his Word where he speaks to me. Why? Because life is too busy, because I let it get too busy and I don't take the time to listen. Although he's always there. He's never left me, but is always waiting patiently to speak to me. Today he does that, through Word and Sacrament.

He says, "**Peace be with you.**" How can he say that? How could a God forgive his children who so often abandon him? How could Jesus say to us today, "**Peace be with you?**" Same reason he could say it to his disciples. He can say it because of his great love for you and me. He showed them the proof of his love; the deep scars on his hands and in his side, the nails which had pierced his flesh, the spear which had been driven into his side. These scars represented the punishment God had determined for them and for you and me, for our transgressions. Jesus had lovingly taken their sins and your sins and mine on himself. How could he do this? Because God is love and he wants us to be saved. He wants peace between us and him. He reconciled us to himself by providing a perfect life of faithful trust through Christ's life, by providing the punishment for sins in his Son's death to satisfy his wrath.

Just in case they wondered, He showed his disciples proof of his love, his scars. He told them again and again, "Peace be with you." In the same way, in case we ever wonder, He shows us proof, his body and blood with this bread and wine. He says to you, "Here is the price I paid for you, for you to have peace with God. Eat and drink and know your sins are forgiven." In case we wonder if there is peace with God, he shows you proof through water and Word, "Here I have washed your sins away. You are pure and holy. I have taken your guilt away." He speaks to you again and again through his Word, "Peace be with you."

Imagine how powerful those words must have been to the disciples. After all they had done, the first words out of his mouth were not rebuke or anger, but "Peace to you." People often say it's hardest to forgive yourself. Peace from Jesus allows you to do just that. You know that you are at peace with God, this is what matters most, and you will be at peace with yourself. What kind of peace? True, lasting peace. Not the peace the people of Libya have knowing their dictator is overthrown, but peace of knowing God has forgiven me, that I am right with him, that when I sleep tonight, I will sleep in peace, "And if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take," I will sleep in perfect peace until he raises me on the last day to be with him and all believers in a place of eternal rest.

Jesus says to us today, "I am sending you," to extend that peace to others. First, take that peace to heart for yourself. Then, take that peace to others. One of the ways Jesus wants us to carry this message of peace is through what we call "The Ministry of the Keys."

The ministry of the keys is one of the most important teachings of the Bible; unfortunately it is also one of the most neglected. An old seminary professor once told me that he believed you can determine the strength of a congregation based on how well they carry out the ministry of the keys. It is in these verses that God entrusts the keys to every believer. **"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.'"** The keys God gives every believer in his Church is the power to forgive sin or to withhold forgiveness. That is equivalent to Jesus giving each of you a key to the front door of heaven. You have the power either to lock people out or open the door and let them in.

You may ask, "Doesn't God say he wants all people to be saved? Why would God ever want to lock anyone out of heaven? And why would he give *us* (and all Christians) the keys to the front door?" God does want all people to be saved, but the Bible also says, **"Do not be deceived; God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows."** (Galatians 6:7) If another Christian chooses to reject Jesus by continuing to live in impenitent sin, he is making a mockery out of Jesus, his work, and God's grace. God will not stand for that. God demands that we lock the door to heaven to any Christian who refuses to repent of their sin. God says that when Christians deal with one another in this way, it is just as valid and certain as if Jesus were dealing with us face to face. **"If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."**

You may be scratching your head again and asking, "How is this proclaiming peace?" If we as Christians do not warn other Christians of the seriousness of their unrepentant sinning, then they will die and live in eternal condemnation. But when we proclaim to them that because of their stubbornness to repent, the doors to heaven are shut, we pray that God will work through that message to turn them back to him. What happens when you confront a Christian with their sin and they repent? You forgive them—no matter what the sin. You use the loosing key and unlock the door to heaven to them. Jesus told us to do so. **"If you forgive them, they are forgiven."** Then they will have peace.

Think of how the prophet Nathan did that in our First Lesson this morning. King David was a lying, cheating, adulterous murderer. He lived in willful impenitence for almost a year! Finally God sent the prophet Nathan to David to expose his sin. But he did it in a loving way. If you want to understand what it means to be to speak the truth in love with

gentleness and respect, study the story of David and Nathan over and over again. That Bible story is not only noteworthy on how to rebuke sin, but on how to use the ministry of the keys. The moment a sinner repents, you forgive them. The moment David said, **“I have sinned against the Lord,”** the first words out of Nathan’s mouth were, **“The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.”** That’s ministry of the keys at its finest. This is the ministry that Jesus sends you to do – to announce forgiveness and peace to the repentant, reassure them that they are holy and righteous in God’s sight for Jesus’ sake.

Once Nebraska lawmakers realized their blunder the number of children dropped off at hospitals declined greatly. The revised law now states that only newborns less than 30 days of age may be dropped off at any hospital in the state of Nebraska without prosecution. It’s hard for us not to judge those parents who abandon their children. But isn’t a wonder and a miracle of God’s grace, that in spite of who we were, our Father still accepts us, and loves us and makes us his children, and then gives us a wonderful message of peace, and the great responsibility to share that peace with others! What a wonderful privilege to be called a child of God! I pray that the Holy Spirit would make you strong and courageous this week as you carry those keys and the message of peace. Amen.