When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. Amen.

The day of that first Easter was drawing to a close as the evening shadows lengthened and night was not far away. Ten of the eleven disciples of our Lord were hiding in a home because they were afraid of what the Jews might do. The morning had started with the earth quaking as the rock closing off the entrance to the tomb was rolled aside by the Lord's angel. The women who had met the angels and then had seen and heard Jesus early in the morning had brought this news to the disciples.

Peter and John had seen the strange sight in the tomb. Mary Magdalene had seen the angels and Jesus Himself and had brought the message from Him. Then came the appearance of Jesus to Peter, of which we know the fact and effect but no details, not even the hour or the place. Finally came the report of the two disciples who had gone to Emmaus. They returned and while the two from Emmaus were still speaking, Jesus appears to the entire company.

Thus, we come to the point where our text begins for this morning's message. Listen to the words of the Holy Spirit in John 20:19-23 as we realize the truth that "Christ Sends You!"

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you!" When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Thus far the Word of God.

Imagine the scene if you will. The disciples are afraid of what the Jews might do to them. Obviously, if they got the leader, they would be brave enough to go after His disciples. These hostile Jews had murdered Jesus and had threatened to expel from the synagogue all who confessed Jesus as the Messiah. Ten of the eleven disciples, probably along with others, were huddled together in a room with the doors locked.

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The Bible states: Jesus came and stood among them. Among the strange ideas connected with these words are that Jesus climbed up a ladder and through a window; or descended from the roof down a stairway; or had sneaked into the house before the doors were locked; or slipped in when the two from Emmaus entered; or was allowed to come in by a sneaky doorkeeper. All these rationalizations deny the miracle of our Lord's entry.

Others make the doors up of themselves to let Jesus walk in; or as though they were not there; or they have Him walk right through the walls of the house. In His Risen and Victorious state, time, space, the rock of the tomb, the walls and the doors of buildings no longer hamper the body of our Lord. He appears where He desires to appear, and His visible presence disappears when He desires to have it so. This is completely supernatural -- completely incomprehensible to our minds. The Bible simply states: Jesus came and stood among them.

While the disciples had believed that Jesus had risen from the dead, when our living Lord now suddenly stood in the room before their very eyes, the effect was terrifying to them. No doubt, there were mixed thoughts. They had all fallen away from the Lord only three days earlier. They had thought only of their own welfare and safety as they melted into the shadows and darkness of Good Friday. What would He say the them regarding their failures? How would He react to all that they had done, which was so contrary to the will of the Lord?

We, too, can ask the same questions of our own actions and lack of actions. How many times have we fallen away from the Lord, neglecting Him as we go about our daily activities? Pet sins, ungodly language, unholy thoughts, denying the fact that we are His disciples--all these and more -- we desire to hide in from others in the shadows of our own memories and the darkness of sin. Locked behind the doors of our attempts to keep others from knowing about such actions, words spoken and thoughts of our minds, we want no one to come in and know about them. Yet, the same One Who is not limited by the physical doors of that house in Jerusalem, is not limited by our attempts to block Him out of knowing exactly everything we have ever done and every thought that has ever raced across our minds.

Would our Lord say anything different to us than what He said to those people behind the locked doors in Jerusalem? No. He came and stood among them and said: Peace be with you! These first words are ones of greeting. But this common form of greeting, meaning only a kindly human wish (like "Have a nice day") when used by ordinary lips means infinitely more when spoken by the lips of Jesus. As the person, so the word. When Jesus says "peace" He actually gives what the word says. It is not a lovely-sounding phrase that is empty but rather one that is filled with a heavenly reality. This "peace" is the condition and the situation of peace when we have been reconciled to God. Jesus had accomplished that peace for the world on the cross. So when confronted with the Risen Christ, these disciples who had fled from the Lord of the universe, were confronted with the Prince of Peace Who loved them. He does so for us as well, despite our failures, He comes to us with the offer of peace.

And having said this, He showed His hands and His side to them. The disciples had to be convinced of the identity of Jesus, which the marks of the crucifixion demonstrated. In addition, John points out how His hands and side cast their light upon His greeting of peace. Here Jesus shows the disciples
the very price at which He bought our peace -- the nail prints and the wound caused by the spear -- the evidence of His death by crucifixion. These holy wounds proclaim that God is at peace with us. Despite how you might feel about yourself, about what you have done or thought -- despite how you might feel about God, the objective truth of god's peace with the world is seen in the marks of the crucifixion. Our Lord Jesus extended His hands on the cross to be pierced by the nails and He extends those same hands to you and says: "Peace be with you!" Those pierced hands and His pierced heart, take all our guilt away. That, people, is forgiveness! And it's for you. That's His promise!

The reaction of the disciples upon hearing these words of love and forgiveness and peace and acceptance from the Lord? Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord! Our hearts are glad, our souls refreshed, our purpose in life given direction when the word of the Lord penetrates our failures and sins with forgiveness.

But now what? What is to be done now? Listen to Jesus: Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you! He repeats the words "peace be with you." The meaning is the same but the application is different. That peace which you have received is to be taken and shared with others. This peace is not merely to strengthen the hearts of the disciples so they can remain behind the locked doors of their homes. They are to be possessors of the Lord's peace because as His witnesses and messengers they are to dispense this very gift of peace in a peaceless world. Those who have received peace are to be messengers of that peace to the world. The commission to bring the Gospel of Peace and Salvation to the world belongs to the entire church.

Our Lord continues: As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you. How are you and I, then, to do this? Consider how the heavenly Father sent His Son. Did He send Him with all majesty and glory and honor? Was He accompanied by the finest soldiers, the best equipment, all the money needed, with bright lights and a large advertising campaign? No. He came to poor parents under publically questionable circumstances. He came not to be served, but to serve. He took on the task of a humble servant -- a slave. He was obedient to death -- even death on the cross. He came with a simple, yet extraordinary message: For God so loved the world the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. Jesus commissions us to take that same simple, yet life-giving message to a world starving for spiritual food. We are not sent with magic or signs or powers that are spectacular in the eyes of the world. Just as the Lord used common people and simple (even offensive) means in the days of our text, so He does today. He calls ordinary, sinful people and gives them the same message.

John records for us the actions and announcement of Jesus: And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." The gift of the Spirit here made by Jesus is to enable His disciples to exercise the right, the authority and the power with which He now sends them.

Jesus gives to His disciples what has been called the Office to the Keys. It is true that only God can forgive sins. It is also true that Christ has not given up this right to forgive sins. Yet, by these words, He demonstrates the truth that He empowers and even directs His agents -- He acts through us. this power is given to all Christians. You and I have been given this great power and privilege to forgive one another -- and also, to not forgive the sins of those who are impenitent.
What a tremendous task and what an awesome responsibility! We make confession and receive forgiveness in our worship service this morning. We have used the Office of the Keys! Privately, we may use it as well. Martin Luther writes: As when my neighbor comes and says, 'Friend, I am distressed in my conscience, say and absolution to me'; then I may freely do this, preach the gospel to him tell him how he is to appropriate the works of Christ and is firmly to believe Christ's righteousness is his, and his sins are Christ's. This is the greatest service I may render to my neighbor!

As the Father has sent me, even so, I send you! What you and I have in these words are represented on the banner. Take a look at that banner. The message is the one of the cross of Christ Who died. The cross is empty signifying the that He is no longer dead, but alive. The white dove is the Holy spirit which comes to us, brings us to faith and empowers us to do our Lord's work.

The Lord of the Church has given us such humble and simple means of making disciples of all nations. We take with us the book -- the Word of God. That Word is able to bring life and salvation and salvation and forgiveness to all who hear it. Simple water is used as a means of God's grace to bring infants into His Kingdom. Nothing spectacular in the eyes of the world -- it is even an offense to many -- even to some who are called Christians. How the world and many Christians howl when the truth of infant baptism is announced, when the real presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper is confessed as Jesus' last will and testament, and when forgiveness of sins is announced within the church.

Nevertheless, in the midst of all the clamorings of the world, of those who doubt -- when you are assailed by weakness and Satan and accused by your conscience, I direct you to remember the words of your Lord . . .

... "Peace be with you!" Amen.