

JOHN 20:19-31
ST JAMES', 28.4.19, 11.00 am

INTRODUCTION

A couple of weeks ago, Joel spent the weekend doing a practice expedition for his bronze Duke of Edinburgh award. It was a bit different from my day! He and his friends had to camp overnight, and carry all they needed with them. We had it easy! We stayed in a youth hostel, and only carried a day sack with us. I'm ashamed to say that I didn't take my DofE any further than that weekend . . .

The teacher who was in charge took me and one other girl to Castleton in Derbyshire, and sent us off to do a walk on the first day, following tracks and paths. The next day he sent us off again, to find our way round a set of grid references on the map. He made sure that we had all the equipment we needed - map, compass, walking boots and clothes, waterproofs, and so on. Before we went, of course, he'd made sure we could read a map and use a compass, and that we were physically fit enough to complete the walks.

JESUS SENDS HIS DISCIPLES

In our gospel reading, Jesus sends his disciples. We'll come to what he's sending them to do in a minute. But, just as I'd been trained for that weekend in Derbyshire, we know that Jesus had spent three years training his disciples. Actually, he also spent another six weeks with them after this particular occasion. But here he gives them three very important resources, so that they'll be able to do what he's sending

them to do, just like my teacher made sure that we had all the right equipment for our treks in Derbyshire.

The first thing Jesus gives his disciples in this passage is peace. He says *Peace be with you* twice. In Hebrew, 'peace' or *shalom* basically means 'well-being' in its fullest sense; life at its best under the gracious hand of God. It was an everyday greeting – a bit like our 'goodbye', which literally means, 'God be with you'. But Jesus is emphasizing the phrase, because he's not just using it as a greeting. Don't forget that it's still Easter Day; it's the first time Jesus has appeared to his disciples since the resurrection. And by dying and rising to life again, Jesus has removed the barrier which had stood between man and God. For the first time ever, Jesus has made this peace truly possible; he's restored peace, wholeness, fulness and well-being. The disciples need to grasp this truth and they need to experience this peace for themselves, because Jesus is sending them to tell the rest of the world all about it.

The second thing which Jesus gives his disciples is the assurance that he really has risen from the dead, and that it's really him who's speaking to them. He shows them his hands and his side, the wounds which he received on the cross. This proves two things: firstly, it proves that he's not a ghost, or a spirit - he has flesh and bears the wounds of being crucified; secondly, it proves that he's Jesus of Nazareth, and not anyone else - he has the unique wound in his side. The disciples need to grasp and experience for themselves the truth of Jesus' resurrection, because Jesus is sending them to tell the rest of the world all about it.

The third thing which Jesus gives his disciples is the Holy Spirit. Now, we all know that the disciples weren't filled with the Holy Spirit until Pentecost, six or seven weeks later. It was only then that they were 'clothed with power from on high', only then that they began their mission, only then that the Church began to grow. When Jesus breathes on them here, it's a symbolic gesture; Jesus uses it to begin to teach them who the Holy Spirit is: he's the life-breath of the risen Lord! The Holy Spirit is a vital resource for the disciples. Without him, they won't have the power to go and tell the world that Jesus has risen from the dead; without the Holy Spirit, they won't have the power to go and tell the world that because of Jesus' death and resurrection we can all have peace with God. But Jesus is giving them the Holy Spirit, the very power which brought him through death and resurrection. With the Holy Spirit, they *will* have the power to go and tell the world all that they've witnessed during the past three years, and especially in the past week.

I've hinted that Jesus is sending the disciples to tell the world about his death and resurrection, and that he's made it possible for everyone to have peace with God. Jesus doesn't actually say that here. He simply says, "*as the Father has sent me, I am sending you*". We know why God the Father sent Jesus into the world from John 3:17: *God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him*. Jesus sends the disciples to take forward the work which the Father sent him to do. And central to that work is bearing witness to Jesus' death and resurrection, and to all that means for all of us.

CONCLUSION

Over the last 2000 years or so, Jesus has continued to send his disciples out to tell the world about his death and resurrection. Today, he gives us the same resources he gave those original disciples in Jerusalem. Jesus gives us peace; he gives us the assurance that he's risen from the dead, and that it really is he who sends us; and he gives us the power of the Holy Spirit, the power which brought him through death and resurrection, so that we have the power to go and tell the world the good news: that Jesus is alive, and that through his death and resurrection, God gives us peace, wholeness, fulness and well-being.

Finally, let's remember that Jesus hasn't simply handed the task over. Yes, he's completed the central part of his work, and yes, we can no longer see his body, or touch his wounds. But he's promised to remain with us to the end of the age, to come and dwell in the hearts of believers, and to be present whenever we gather in his name to worship him. We know he's alive, not just because of what we read in Scripture, but because we each have a personal relationship with him. So let's resolve, both by what we say and what we do, to bear witness to our risen Lord, Jesus Christ.