

**The Good News of the Church**  
**John 20:19-23**  
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Every week, we get a couple hundred people together that have very little in common! I mean, what do I have in common with you?

But it gets more strange. We all stand up and sit down on command. Like well trained dogs. Sit! Here's a treat! Bruce hands out gummy worms to the obedient ones. If you're not getting a gummy worm, what's that saying? I'm just saying.

Then, we all sing together. Not like at a concert. We all sing. Even the tone deaf ones. I'm looking at a couple of people really hard, here.

Finally, some person gets up and lectures at you for twenty minutes, and you all try to pay attention, but your cell phone is updating and sending you the football scores, and you didn't sleep well last night, and when is this going to end, and oh dang! They asked us to stand, and I didn't and now I don't get a gummy worm.

So, that is kind of an exaggeration, but for many people on Sunday mornings, how much of an exaggeration is it really? How is Church good news to anyone?

John 20 tells us about the first meeting of the Christian church. Beginning in verse 19.

Here are the disciples, witnesses of the life of Christ, who saw lepers healed, the dead raised to life, the broken made whole, the Pharisees and Sadducees and even the power of Rome shaken. For a little while, anyways.

Now hiding behind a locked door.

Jesus suddenly pulls a Houdini, and is standing in the middle of them. I'm thinking that suddenly appearing in the middle of a group of terrified people with two swords is a good way to become a different kind of holy. But that is a rabbit trail.

Jesus speaks peace over them. And then, he tells them to get out there. They are not the powerless, fearful remnant of a failed messiah, they are those with the power over not only life — for they will go on to raise the dead in Jesus' name — but also the same power of forgiveness, and spiritual wholeness that Jesus showed while he was ministering.

It must have worked. Because not long after this, we know that the early church was having a decided impact on Roman society. . .

John 20:21 (?) As the father sent me, so I am sending you.

Sending agents to do the work of the kingdom has a long, rich history in the Bible.

God sent Abraham to be a blessing to the world around him. Genesis 12:1-4 tells the story. What happened? Well, he had some high points. He stopped praying to idols, and he almost killed his only son in a human sacrifice, if you want to call that a high point. He obediently left his family, friends and inheritance on the word of a new God. Yet his failures also abound. He twice prostituted his wife because he was a chicken. He divides his family over a land dispute, has a

child by a slave woman whom he then abandons to the wilderness. For all that Abraham was called a friend of God, and was to bless the nations around him, most of his life is a tale of manipulation and accumulated wealth. This story needed another chapter.

So, God sent Israel to be a blessing as servants and priests to the world. The most charitable word for their efforts would be “less than adequate effort.” Continual abandonment of their covenant with God, continual mistreatment of each other and the nations around them. So again, the story needs another chapter.

And God sent Jesus to bless, redeem, and forgive the world. Here, finally, is a success story. But it is all upside down! The long awaited Messiah, who was expected to establish a new, powerful nation with the people of Israel as his primary rulers, who was to finally expel the filthy Romans and the unclean, instead has supper with tax collectors, sinners, allows prostitutes to wash his feet sensuously with their hair, who shows absolutely no regard for purity laws and touches lepers and bleeding women, and even dead bodies. Ugh! And then, the finale, he dies as a criminal.

And this is the definition of success? This is the answer to the obvious question, how does God send Jesus?

Absolutely. This is amazing news. This is the good news of God — That the God of heaven himself would live a life of one of his own creations.

In fact, the way that the Father sent Jesus into the world is described in a poem of stunning downward mobility in Philippians 2:5-11, where it says this:

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing, by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross.”

He starts out as God almighty, the powerful word that created everything, that rules over all of creation, and forces order out of absolute chaos. He begins his descent into creation, lives as an itinerant teacher with no place to rest, until finally he meets his untimely end. But it isn't just death that he submits to. Paul is clear, it is death on a cross. Not just death of the body, but the mockery, the absolute lack of control over your voice, your pain, your own bodily functions. A broken body crudely displayed for the jeering crowds — crucifixion was intended to end your life, your reputation, your credibility, and any legacy you might leave.

Quite a step down from Almighty Sovereign.

We often miss the initial verse of Paul's quote, “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

In 1724 a young man named Arthur was born to the estate manager of Dr. Price, the Archbishop of Cashel, Ireland. He received the gifts of education, learning reading, writing, and business from his family's benefactor. He also learned the family business — brewing beer.

Ireland was suffering under poor harvests, and the rise of hard liquor that became known as the Gin Craze was destroying the fabric of Irish society. Beer was seen as healthy (especially given the need for vitamin B during times of poor nutrition), safer to drink than fouled water, and somewhat nutritious. Thus Guinness Breweries, under the ownership of Arthur Guinness — a God-fearing protestant — was established.

Why am I telling you this?

Because, Arthur didn't stop at trying to brew good beer.

The Guinness Brewery was more than a profitable business. Listen to this:

Edward Cecil Guinness, great-grandson to Arthur, said, "You cannot make money from people unless you are willing for people to make money from you." Here are all the ways that Guinness cared for people.

Wages 10 to 20 percent above average, with a bonus of an extra week's wage on the Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Medical care for employees and their full families, including company doctors, dentists, nurses, massage, and rudimentary social work. Retreat centers to help recovery from tuberculosis, company funded pensions, a savings bank and in house mortgages, community competitions with cash prizes, education and concerts for the wives of workers, since the moral and intellectual level of the home would rise only to that of the mother or wife who lived there. Education for every employee between 14 and 30, with advanced education if they qualified, paid for by the company. all expenses paid excursion days for the employee and their family, or a date for the single workers.

Not only this, but Arthur himself founded and paid for Ireland's first Sunday School system, established housing for the poor, founded an anti-dueling society, and chaired the board for an orphan's hospital.

In 1890, one Guinness descendent inherited some 5 million pounds. He took his inheritance, moved his family into the slums, and dedicated himself to serving the poor.

All of this from one, dedicated man of God, who took his faith and responsibilities to his calling seriously.

Who does God send now? Us! The church! This is what theologians refer to as the age of the church, where the church is the primary agent through whom God acts in history. As the Father sent Jesus to teach, redeem and heal, so He sends us. He restores his church to their role in the garden of Eden. Look at the parallels! He breathes on us. We are filled with his Spirit. We are given a task.

In Eden, that task was to rule and have dominion, till and keep. When you take it within context, these words add up to "serve, and protect". God elevated the youngest of the generations of the heavens and the earth (see Genesis 2:1?) to rule and have dominion. He chose the weakest of the earth to bear his image. In every place of scripture, ruling and dominion are based in humble service. "What is man that you should take note of him?" (Psalm 8:4-6).

In John, the task is described a little bit differently.

Forgive Sin.

When I first read this, I thought that I'd misread it. Then I thought I had somehow managed to get a faulty bible. That happened to me once. I got a bible that was missing Leviticus and Numbers. You wouldn't believe how long it took me to discover that. But that's an issue for another day.

We are given the responsibility to either forgive or retain a person's sins. That definitely makes me uncomfortable. It sounds completely above my pay grade. It would be impossible, in fact, were it not for the Holy Spirit, filling the Church with power, wisdom, and grace. And that makes all the difference!

What does it mean, then, to forgive sins? The greek word in this passage means to cover over, or to release from. Let me explain.

People sin, I believe, because they are experiencing a gap between what they want and what they experience. Kids fight over a toy. Adults fight over wealth and status. Nations fight over resources and power. Churches fight over tithing congregants.

For example, we started off in goodness, in Genesis 1. Then, we decided that God was holding out on us. How could we know that some of that evil stuff wasn't good unless we know it? So we traded the immortal God for knowledge of evil. Bad trade.

Ever since then, we've been putting bandaids on the wounds.

Loneliness — social media.

Insecurity — wealth accumulation.

Tiredness — caffeine.

Identity — self-identification.

There are better solutions to these issues, but they all involve Jesus! Loneliness? Belonging. Insecurity? Dependence on God and each other. Tiredness? Sabbath. Identity? Image of God.

But how can people know these things, unless someone tells them?

The church is nothing less than the manifestation of God's hand and love in the world today! Just like those silly Galileans two millennia ago, loving on everybody, taking care of not only their own but everybody else's as well, we serve as a prophetic taste of the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

While we were in Cuba last year, I was watching Nevin pretty closely. Sometimes it was for the fun of people thinking that Fidel Castro was out for a walk. Most often it was to see how people reacted to Colleen's husband, someone they loved even though they had never met him. I watched them surround him in a church service, lay hands on him, and pray for Colleen, for Nevin, for Silas and Errol, and join their voices to those of ours here in prayer for one of our own.

The other side of that story is coming up in February, when Colleen and Nevin step through customs to be greeted by Remelies, when they walk into her church, and see their Cuban church family. That joyful celebration will be one to watch!

Friends, this is the church. We join together in celebration, in joy, and in sorrow and hurt and tears. We support not only our own, but everyone, with service, prayer, and human touch.

The Church gathers weekly to reinforce our center in the Triune God. The Father sends us, Jesus shows us the way, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to overcome our natural, cultural tendencies.

We call out to God together in prayer for our neighbours, friends, leaders, and culture going to hell. We intercede for those experiencing hell here and now in their bodies, their families, their communities.

We sing. Together. As one voice, coming together to declare the attributes of our God in creative, beautiful sacrifice of worship.

We listen to hopefully wise counsel from the word of God, in order to be inspired, challenged, and encouraged to go out into the week and generate new stories of the Kingdom of God interacting through us with our world.

We stand, and sit, and sing, and pray, and listen, all together, because Christianity is not an individual sport but a team sport. We act together, sent in the same way that Jesus was sent.

Can you imagine anything further from the obligation of standing and sitting, trying to stay awake for twenty minutes until I can finally sink back into my private distractions from life?

The Church is good news. It is good news for the world around us, because in us they are to get a taste of the Kingdom of God, just enough to whet the appetite for more.

And it is also good news for me. I am not alone in this, but God has given me each one of you, saints of God who sacrifice everything for his glory, over the entire world, and over the span of thousands of years. I belong to the body of Jesus Christ, his glorious church.

As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.

What are you going to do about it?