

**Series:** The Garden of Evidence and Intimacy (a Gospel of John study)

**Sermon Text:** John 20:19-23

**Key Word(s):** Go and Tell

(\*This account is also found in Mark 16:12-20\*; Luke 24:36-53)

We're in week 3 of a 4-week series called, "*The Garden of Evidence and Intimacy*." In this study of John 20, we're seeing evidence of Christ's resurrection and of the intimacy Jesus seeks with His followers (i.e., a personal, affectionate, and loving relationship). We're also being challenged with a question Jesus posed after He raised Lazarus from death in John 11:25-26: "*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though they die, yet shall they live...Do you believe this?*" Our first lesson focused on how **the resurrection of Jesus changed everything**. In lesson 2, we learned that **while evidence is the start, intimate love is the goal**. My aim today, is for us to process this...

**BIG IDEA:** Jesus wants us to tell others what He's done for us.

Let's begin by reading *John 20:19-20: On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, (the day Jesus was raised) the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews (he didn't mean all Jews; this is his "code word" for the religious leaders who killed Jesus; remaining followers feared also being killed cf. Acts), Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."* [which was, and still is, a common middle eastern greeting. Humans, of course, can only "wish" each other *peace*, but the risen Christ can infuse us with *peace*. Moreover, this phrase assured these fearful deserters that He had mediated eternal *peace* between them and a holy God.] *When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.* The account from Luke 24 provides a bit more detail: "*They were startled, frightened, and thought they saw a spirit. He said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is me. Touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.'*" So, this moment verified His identity and that He was not a ghost. Luke also tells us Jesus ate some broiled fish with them. His resurrected body was apparently in better shape than when they'd last seen Him (after being mutilated on the cross). What's interesting though is how it seemed to have special abilities (Did it pass through a locked door? Could it appear/disappear/change form?), yet [certain marks of His suffering remained](#) (cf. 20:27). Do you know this fact matters to those in the disabled community who believe not all disabilities need to be healed? [Think about it](#): on Jesus, scars typically viewed as marks of shame became marks of His glorious victory over sin and death. Let's be careful speculating about what we think perfect bodies might look like (cf. 1 Corinthians 15).

**What's even more curious** are the incredible statements we'll unpack today in *verses 21-23* where *Jesus again said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I'm sending you."* When he had said this, he *breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."* What was this all about? First, I should mention how the details of the 40 days between His resurrection and ascension are condensed here and in Luke's gospel. While the book of Acts (also written by Luke) expands on them a bit, we shouldn't get hung up trying to harmonize the events. I mean, John clearly cared more about the meaning than the sequence. Second, today's passage is a moment John set up in chapter 1 by introducing Jesus as the co-Creator of everything. He kept hinting at this event in other chapters where he documented [Jesus' many promises to give the Spirit](#). Now, in this climactic moment, we're told the co-Creator *breathed the Holy Spirit on them*. This would've caused a Jewish reader to think about the Garden of Eden, specifically how Genesis 2:7 says, "*the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*" John is clearly implying the new creation had begun! Jesus, who was equally God and man (the New Adam), was *breathing out His* lifegiving *Holy Spirit* who would begin to restore and recreate things ruined by sin (also see the "*Life from Dry Bones*" note below).

**So, what did this mean for them and for us?** In *verses 21-22*, we're supposed to see a relationship between *Jesus sending them* and *the Spirit* being given to empower their mission. So, there was both information and experience, right? And being a Christian involves both, doesn't it? It's not just about information, it's about transformation--about Jesus giving us the power to change and to do things. In this case, Jesus commissioned (*sent*) them to carry on the mission God had *sent* Him to do. What was that? Well, in Luke 19:10, for instance, Jesus declared, "*The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*" Who is this "[Son of Man](#)" and what does that mean? Well, John repeatedly connected this title to Jesus, and it ultimately means He's the Messiah (Christ) promised by Israel's prophets ([our sermon on John 19:23-24](#) reveals more about that). In John 10, this "*Son of Man*" claimed he had come not just to rescue the lost sheep of Israel, but also "*other sheep*" from all over the world. Thus, Romans 1:16 says that "*the gospel* [isn't just information, it] *is the power of God unto salvation, to the Jew first and also the Greek.*" All this means that the rescue work Jesus began in Israel, was handed over to His Jewish converts to be passed down generationally through the church that Jesus founded. See the point? Since they were *sent*, then so are we--you and I get to carry on Christ's rescue mission and message!

So, what's the message? In *verse 23* Jesus said, *"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."* Certain groups, like the Roman Catholic church, believe this gift was only given to the 11 and then passed down to certain church leaders, but that's hard to reconcile with other disciples being present in John 20, in Luke 24, and in Acts 2. Jesus' words are best understood here, not as some power to decide who gets to be forgiven and who doesn't, but as [the foundation of our message and lifestyle](#). This is affirmed in another account of **this moment found in Luke 24:45-48**: *"Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures and said, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.'*" We're to view forgiveness as a reality and a command--to forgive is not optional because it's based on Scripture, not our opinions and judgements. That alleviates much of the pressure, right? Our mission is basically to spread the Good News of Christ's achievements and to live differently because of them! Whoever receives this news will be *forgiven*, and whoever rejects it won't be--it's that simple! No need to pressure people or yell at them--Jesus has *sent* us, not to give people a hard time, but to be people of *peace* like He was (cf. [1 Thessalonians 4:9-11](#)). We're also not just seeking superficial agreement, right? The Spirit who empowers us to share the gospel, intends to help others receive the message, be born again, and grow! So, we should approach sharing the gospel like raising children--we don't just feed them info and say, *"Make better choices."* Our mission is to love and nurture people into being, learning, and relating with Jesus and His Church. **In the end, we're to also warn people that the alternative is foolish**--to reject Jesus is like refusing a guaranteed cure to a deadly disease--they are choosing to remain under the weight and guilt of their sin (cf. John 3:16-18). The Good News is that whoever receives Jesus by grace through faith is fully (not partially) forgiven! And if you struggle to believe that a holy God would be willing to do such an incredible thing, let me close by quoting Him from Isaiah 43:25: *"I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I won't remember your sins"* (cf. Psalm 103:12; Jeremiah 31:34; Micah 7:19). If you want to know more about receiving or sharing Jesus, let's make time to talk about it.

**Let's pray:** Father, every Sunday, pastors around the world lead congregations to confess sins, repent, and receive forgiveness, not because we have special powers, but because Jesus made it true. It is our duty to repeat your gospel message, so that people come to believe it. Your message is like an antidote to this world's guilt-ridden, revenge-seeking, cancel-culture messages. It's also not a private message or experience that we should keep to ourselves. Christians possess words that supernaturally *breathe* peace into anyone willing to receive them by grace through faith. Just as He *breathed* life into the 1<sup>st</sup>

Adam, the new Adam (Jesus) has *breathed* life into us, so that through our sharing of the gospel, His Holy Spirit can *breathe* life into others. Just as we would never refuse CPR to a non-breathing person, help us oh Lord, to be on the lookout for such people and to never withhold your words of life to those who need resuscitation and redemption. Amen.

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

### **Preparing for and applying our sermon from John 20:19-23.**

- Take a deep breath and ask God to speak to you as you read this passage. Share a few of your impressions and takeaways from these passages.
- What do you make of the resurrected Jesus appearing with scars on His body, and what does it imply about our resurrected bodies? How much does Scripture really say about them? Which of our features will remain and which will be made new? More importantly, do we speak of this in ways that cause people with disabilities to feel like lesser, unequal members of Christ's body?
- What did God the Father send His Son Jesus to do? How is our mission different, yet much like His? What is our message and our responsibility to it? How do people receive the benefits of the gospel?

**Other Articles/Songs/Videos:** Please ask us about many other resources.

### **Quotes related to this passage:**

- **Mark's account:** "Some manuscripts end the book with 16:8; others include verses 9–20 immediately after verse 8. At least one manuscript inserts additional material after verse 14; some manuscripts include after verse 8 the following: But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. These manuscripts then continue with verses 9–20." ESV Footnotes
- **Why they hadn't gone to Galilee yet:** "Even aside from the Feast of Unleavened Bread still going on, the heaviest period of mourning normally lasted seven days, so none of them would have left Jerusalem for Galilee yet anyway. The \*disciples would remain inside to mourn." (Keener, 310)
- **Peace by with you:** "His words 'peace be with you' (repeated in 20:19 and 21) were a standard Hebrew greeting (Judg. 6:23; 19:20; 1 Sam. 25:6; 3 John 1:15), still used in the Middle East today. But here these words are far more than a greeting. At a profoundly personal level, Jesus is summing up the essence of his work and presence in the world. Peace is the gift of his kingdom. In 14:27 and 16:33 Jesus promised that this peace would be his gift to them; now he has delivered it...Therefore to be commissioned (20:21), to advance the work of God as God's agent, means being empowered as Jesus was empowered—obtaining the Spirit, just as Jesus was anointed and as Jesus promised. Thus John 20:22 becomes the climax to the entire Gospel. The Spirit—suggested throughout his public ministry, promised in the Upper Room, and symbolized at the cross—is now given to the disciples in a provocative and personal way. Jesus breathes (on them) and says, 'Receive [the] Holy Spirit.' John 20:22 fulfills the word given at the Feast of Tabernacles, where Jesus' offer of living water referred to the Holy Spirit, which

could not be distributed until Jesus was glorified (7:39). Now the hour of glorification has reached its climax. Jesus is departing, and he places the Spirit that is within him in their lives.” (Burge, 558-559)

- **This wasn't just for the apostles:** “We dare not limit Jesus’ commission to the apostles. Who was present when Jesus spoke the words, ‘I am sending you’? Luke 24:33 settles that question. It was ‘the Eleven [apostles] and those with them [other disciples]’ who were assembled together when Jesus suddenly appeared among them on Easter evening. (Luke 24:36) Note as well that John uses ‘disciples’ in the wider sense in 20:19, for in verse 24 he carefully distinguishes Thomas as ‘one of the Twelve’ from ‘the disciples.’” (Franzmann, 1025)
- **Life from Dry Bones:** “Jesus’ breathing on them recalls Genesis 2:7, when God breathed into Adam the breath of life (it might also be relevant that later Jewish tradition sometimes connected this passage with Ezek 37, when God’s Spirit or wind revives the dead). Jewish literature especially connected the Holy Spirit with the power to prophesy or speak for God. In the Old Testament and early Judaism, God himself is the sole giver of the Spirit. (Keener, 311)
- **The Easter evening breeze:** “The theme of new creation goes deeper still into this passage. When God came looking for Adam in the garden (Genesis 3:8), he and his wife heard the sound of him at the time of the evening breeze. Now, on the evening of the new creation’s first day, a different wind sweeps through the room. The words for ‘wind’, ‘breath’ and ‘spirit’ are the same (this is true in both Hebrew and Greek). This wind is the healing breath of God’s spirit, come to undo the long effects of primal rebellion. This takes us back to the moment of creation itself. In Genesis 2:7 God breathed into human nostrils his own breath, the breath of life, and humankind became alive, alive with God’s life. Now, in the new creation, the restoring life of God is breathed out through Jesus, making new people of the disciples, and, through them, offering this new life to the world. The result is that peace, twice repeated here, which Jesus had promised in 14:27 and 16:33. (Wright, 150)
- **The Spirit on Easter versus Pentecost:** To be with him and to understand him, to see him as he truly was, required a gift of God’s Spirit (as Luke knows well, Luke 24:13–35). I believe the disciples experienced numerous moments of overwhelming glory as the Spirit touched and transformed them—and it all began the moment Jesus returned on Easter. That they would be empowered again, in a different way, on Pentecost does not eliminate the possibility that they were filled earlier. (Burge, 561)
- **Speaking forgiveness and peace:** “But how can we divorce forgiveness from peace? Assured of God’s forgiveness, the penitent sinner has peace in his heart. On the other hand, the sinner who refuses to acknowledge his sins against God and who therefore must be told: “Your sin, unrepented and unconfessed, keeps you under God’s wrath and condemnation: he has the exact opposite of peace, namely, constant torment of soul because of his guilt. To him, especially, the words apply: “‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked’” (Isaiah 57:21). When some despise and reject the gift of forgiveness and peace, they deprive themselves of it. It is not God’s will that they remain without peace. But he forces his peace on no one. God, for his part, leaves nothing undone so that sinners may come to a saving knowledge of forgiveness and peace in his Christ. For that reason, we here see Jesus commissioning his disciples to bring forgiveness and peace to others. With “Peace be with you,” he told them: “You already are the possessors of peace. You are forgiven.” Then he went on to speak the words which authorized and empowered them to be his agents in dispensing forgiveness and peace to their peace-less fellow men...The message of the crucified and risen Christ produces repentance. When hearts distressed by their sins hear that their sins have all been paid for by another, their substitute, this

message moves them to look in faith to God's grace in Christ to rid them of their great guilt. Nor will they look in vain for such deliverance. The Easter gospel does not merely hold out the vague hope that God's forgiveness is possible, that it is available to them if only they fulfill certain conditions, such as first achieving a certain level of holy living, or showing a sincere desire for God's grace, or making 'a decision for Christ.' No, this gospel actually gives and conveys full and free forgiveness and all the blessings which flow from it." (Franzmann, 1024)

- **Unforgiveness:** "The power Jesus bestowed on his disciples has another side to it: 'If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.' Actually, what Jesus said here was something sterner, more sobering. The King James translation using 'retain' and 'are retained' is much closer to Jesus' real meaning. This 'retain' corresponds to the 'bind' of Matthew 16:19, just cited above. The Greek word used here means 'to hold with strength.' Therefore, it means more than 'not to forgive.' We get a clearer picture from some things that Jesus spoke to the impenitent Jews. To the Pharisees he said, 'I am going away [that is, to my Father in heaven], and you will look for me, and you will die in your sins. Where I go, you cannot come' (John 8:21). It would be impossible for them to share the glory of heaven with Jesus because they would die in their sins if they remained impenitent. They would die under the curse and condemnation of their sins and be lost forever in hell. Just a little later Jesus told them: 'If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins' (John 8:24). Refusing to repent and to believe in Jesus as their Messiah, their Savior, they would remain in the deadly grip of their sins. Their sins would be fixed upon them and bring them into eternal condemnation...So, this is the stern verdict the disciples of Jesus were to pronounce upon the impenitent: 'You have no desire to be loosed or set free from your sins by Jesus, but want to cling to them? Very well. But then remember that the damning guilt of those sins will cling to you, too, and will bring you into eternal condemnation, unless you repent before you die.'" (Franzmann, 1028-1029)
- **The remaining question:** "*Who has power on earth to forgive sins?*" In Mark 2:7, the scribes were correct to say that "*Only God can forgive sins!*" In Matthew 9:6 we find out that, "*Jesus had power on earth to forgive sins.*" John is telling us here that those filled with His Spirit (the church) now have this power. Now, this does not mean we have the right to decide who gets forgiven and who doesn't. It's the gospel we proclaim that carries this power (authority) to proclaim forgiveness of sins. In some places, the Bible refers to this as "*The keys to the kingdom.*" While the church isn't endowed with a special ability to read minds and hearts like God does, we've been gifted the incredible privilege to announce the good news (the gospel) to the world."
- **Speculations:** "How did Jesus get into the place where the disciples were assembled? Had he passed through the locked doors? Did he walk through the walls as though they were nothing? After he passed through the walls or doors, did the disciples see him walk toward them? It is best not to ask these questions at all, to say nothing of trying to answer them. Let us realize that here we have something wholly miraculous, supernatural. Therefore, it is totally incomprehensible for us...The Greek here tells us that they did as he commanded them. They did touch him. Their hands did feel actual flesh and bones. Thus Jesus furnished absolute proof as to the reality of his body. What they felt could not have been a "spirit body" such as the miracle-deniers have fetched out of never-never land. (See 1 John 1:1. Note: 'our hands have touched.')" (Franzmann, 1017-1019).
- **Apparent Conflicts:** "When we hear Jesus saying, 'Receive the Holy Spirit,' we may ask: 'But hadn't they received the Holy Spirit before this?' We do so because the disciples had been believers some time before this. And no one can have faith in Jesus unless the Spirit has worked



it in his heart. (John 3:5; 1 Corinthians 12:3) Another question may also come to us: ‘How does Jesus’ imparting of the Holy Spirit fit in with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples 50 days later on Pentecost?’ (Acts 2:4). A big problem seems to loom up here. Some try to solve it by speaking of ‘tokens of the Spirit’ or ‘down-payments of the Spirit’ or ‘different measures of the Spirit.’ Then one gets a picture of the Spirit being divided into parcels. But the Holy Spirit cannot be dissected, so to speak, in that way anymore than the Father and the Son can be. Each one is an undivided and indivisible person of the Holy Trinity. The problem stops being a formidable one when we let one passage of Scripture in particular shed light on the subject. It is 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord...Now, to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.’ Then, to carry out the truth that the Spirit distributes his gifts for the common good, that is, in a way that will serve the needs of his church at a given time, Paul in a masterful way uses the illustration of the body and its various parts. He does this in 12:12–26. Read all of it, and then read the conclusion Paul draws from it in verses 27 through 31...Let us apply this to the case in hand. The disciples addressed by Jesus had already received the gift of faith. That was given for the purpose of making them his own, members of his blessed kingdom. (John 3:3, 5) Now on Easter evening Jesus imparted the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. This gift was given to meet a need at a different time. We said ‘a different time’ because Jesus had won redemption for sinners; he had gained their forgiveness. Here Jesus was giving his disciples the power to pronounce a penitent sinner forgiven for his sake, and to pronounce an impenitent sinner still bound by the guilt and condemnation of his unrepented sins, and, therefore, barred from Christ’s kingdom of salvation. They needed the Holy Spirit to guide and control them as they used this power entrusted to them and the whole church by the head of the Church. Surely, if they used this gift of power according to Jesus’ directions, they would be serving ‘the common good’ (Franzmann, 1026-1027)

### Quotes related to the larger context:

- **Full life:** John said he wrote this letter to help us find “*fullness of life through believing Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*” Chapters 1-12 contain 3 years of real-life stories where people met Jesus during His public ministry. Chapters 13-21 slow way down as Jesus began to reveal His (God’s) heart to His disciples in the week leading up to the cross and resurrection.
- **Book Context:** The Gospel of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, provides a clearly stated purpose. *John 20:30-31* says, “*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*” Some people demand to have all their questions satisfied before bowing to Jesus, yet John claimed his limited account was enough to bring anyone to faith. As we read it, our Savior and friend emerges from the pages as a real person in the real world. Jesus shows us what we could become, if we too would rely on His infinite Father who will gladly supply whatever we need.
- **Life in his name:** Life is the Greek word, “zōē”, which means “Life, Living, Lifetime, Life-Giving” and is where we get the word, “zoology” in English. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says it’s “used in the NT of life as a principle, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and which He gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself, Jhn 5:26, and which the Son manifested in the world, 1Jo 1:2. From this life man has become alienated in consequence of the Fall, Eph 4:18, and of this life men become partakers through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Jhn 3:15, who becomes its Author to all such as

trust in Him, Act 3:15, and who is therefore said to be ‘the life’ of the believer, Col 3:4, for the life that He gives He maintains, Jhn 6:35, 63. Eternal life is the present actual possession of the believer because of his relationship with Christ, Jhn 5:24; 1Jo 3:14, and that it will one day extend its domain to the sphere of the body is assured by the Resurrection of Christ, 2Cr 5:4; 2Ti 1:10. This life is not merely a principle of power and mobility, however, for it has moral associations which are inseparable from it, as of holiness and righteousness. Death and sin, life and holiness, are frequently contrasted in the Scriptures.”

**Bibliography** (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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**Direction for discussion leaders:**

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Go for a single, not a home run.
3. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

**Some great resources for digging deeper into community group life:**

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded)

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://toddengstrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://toddengstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>