

## Sermon for 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Easter, Year A

*St. Martin's Lutheran Church Gladstone  
Calvary Lutheran Church Rockhampton  
Living Waters Lutheran Church Yeppoon QLD*

### **“How does God save the world?”** *Pastor Peter Noble* **John 20:19-31**<sup>1</sup>

*Brothers and Sisters I bring Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

#### **Let's Pray**

Heavenly Father, as Christ breathed the Holy Spirit onto the Apostles and instituted the Office of the Keys to bind and loose sins, may we too rejoice. That you have loosed our sins by faith alone, and opened heaven to your Church by the same Office that is exercised by your Ordained Servants of the Word. To bring peace and comfort to our souls, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### **How Does God Save the World?**

Does God save like Superman or a superhero? Flying around rescuing people in distress? Does God create a human being and leave them to their own devices? How does an eternal, almighty, all-knowing God bring about salvation to the world he made? God who could choose an infinite amount of ways to bring about the saving of a sinful race, ***so how does God save?***

The short answer is: Yes, He *does* save. Through Jesus and his resurrection.

But beyond the resurrection, once Jesus is raised and ascended into heaven, what has God put in place to save people after Jesus ascends to the Father?

Did Jesus just leave the Apostles, after three years of theological-practical hands-on training, and ‘hope for the best’? In humorous jesting: does Jesus say “Goodluck guys, it’s all up to you now”?

Well, in one sense, **yes**. But in another sense, **no**.

Does God have a backup plan? No.

#### **Answer**

God rather, has a mission. Missiologists often refer to this mission as the *Missio Dei* (Latin: ‘the mission of God’). So—How Does God Save the World?

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Ga 1:3–5). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

The mission of God is employed in three ways:

1. Jesus' Resurrection brings *peace* to all believers.
  2. Jesus sends the Apostles (to preach, to teach, to train, baptize, and administer the sacraments)
- and lastly. God is saving the world when:
3. Jesus institutes the Office of the Ministry

### **Context**

The background up to John 20:19 is that Jesus has been crucified. As was custom, Jesus is buried in the grave and Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate if he could take the body of Jesus to bury him. Nicodemus were also there to help clean up Jesus' body with spices and myrrh and perfume and such to cover Jesus' body with. It seems as though they were pressed for time as the day of Passover preparation was so close that they buried Jesus in a tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea. Three days later, on the first day of the week (Sunday for us Westerners), Mary finds the tombstone rolled back when it was still dark. John and Peter go to the tomb. They find the grave clothes and they don't understand what's happening. Mary stays at the tomb weeping and meets Jesus, thinking he was a gardener. Jesus reveals himself to her by simply saying her name, "Mary". She goes back to the disciples and testifies that she has seen the Christ.

This is very powerful because she is a woman and her testimony would not mean anything in this 1st century Greco-Roman-Jewish culture. But the fact that John has written this account into the text gives the impression of embarrassment, or what scholars call the 'embarrassment theory'. So much so that it must be true. Otherwise, it would not have been written, not unless the fact is beyond reasonable doubt to be factually true. You wouldn't write the facts into history and embarrass yourself like this by saying that a woman's testimony is fact. Not unless it was *actually* the case because you risk shame on yourself. (Old Testament law states that two witnesses must be established before a person is put to death.)

So Jesus is revealed to Mary, then Jesus, that same day, appears to his disciples. Let's begin verse 19 of chapter 20.

### ***Jesus Appears to the Disciples***

*<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." (John, ESV)*

Three questions:

1. Why were the disciples meeting in secret?

They feared that they too might get persecuted by the Jewish powers of the Sanhedrin. Let us not forget, the high priest could have you thrown out of the synagogue and persecuted. If he is able to manipulate Pilate and the government to crucify Jesus – a humble, quiet leader – what could he do to you? It's no wonder the disciples were meeting in secret.

2. How did Jesus get in when the doors were locked?

**20:19** Some interpreters understand **the doors being locked** to imply that Jesus miraculously passed through the door or the walls of the room, though the text does not explicitly say this. Since Jesus clearly had a real physical body with flesh and bones after he rose from the dead, one possibility is that the door was miraculously opened so that the physical body of Jesus could enter, which is consistent with the passage about Peter going through a locked door some time later (see Acts 12:10).

3. What is the significance of this phrase: "Peace be with you."?

This is no coincidence that this statement from Jesus is in our liturgy and Lutheran Church services, and that our pastors say the same phrase. After the Church receives absolution in the Divine Service on page 7 of our LHS, (you can look at that in your own time) and also in the Order of Confession and Absolution. p. 34 of your LHS. I used this phrase today when I absolved you after we as a Church confessed our sins to God.

It is also used in the *Church Rites of the Lutheran Church of Australia* on p. 79<sup>2</sup> under the **Funeral Rite** section. When the immediate family who is grieving over the death of a loved one arrives at the entrance of the Church, such a phrase said to a grief-stricken family **is fitting and right**. It is not an ambiguous phrase that carries no meaning. It is loaded with apostolic, Christological and salvific implications and meaning, which relates directly to the **Office of the Ministry**, or also known as the **Office of the Keys**, or **the Office of Christ**. We'll unpack this more in point three of what this Office is and its function. But my point is, "peace be with you" are words spoken by Christ, to Christ's people.

Firstly, the Apostles in this context – and naturally by extension to you today through the Office of the Keys. What began with Christ is still being proclaimed

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<sup>2</sup> Lutheran Church of Australia, *Church Rites* (ed. by David A. Schubert; Adelaide: Openbook Publishers, 1994), 79.

through Apostolic Succession. Such a phrase from Christ would have brought peace to the disciples and by extension it brings us peace also.

Hence, **how is God saving the world?**

**Answer:**

**1. Jesus' Resurrection brings *peace* to all believers.**

He proclaims the ultimate peace, which he proclaims us. "Peace be with you". Amen.

Let's continue in verse 20:

*<sup>20</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."*

This brings me to my second point.

**God saving the world by:**

**2. Jesus sending the Apostles**

Jesus shows his hands and his side. This made the disciples glad. The Greek word for "glad" could also be 'rejoice', although I think they were more at peace than rejoicing in this context. **χαίρω** (fut. **χαρήσομαι** ; aor. pass. **ἐχάρην**, inf. **χαρῆναι**) *rejoice, be glad*; **χαῖρε, χαίρετε, χაίρειν** *greetings, etc. (of salutations)*<sup>3</sup>

Then Jesus repeats himself: "<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.'" This statement is the idea that **God the Father is a sending God.**

He uses **means** to achieve his purposes, that achieve the **ends**. One could say, God ordains the ends as well as the means.

God has a plan to save the world. God the Spirit resurrects Jesus, this brings peace to us. Now God is going to send the Apostles in the same way he sent Jesus.

The Father, the first person of the Trinity has sent the Son to the World. The Son dies and is resurrected to pay for the sins of the world so that all might come to faith in Jesus' name.

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<sup>3</sup> Newman, B. M., Jr. (1993). *A Concise Greek-English dictionary of the New Testament*. (p. 196). Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; United Bible Societies.

Now the Son is about to return to the Father and he is now handing the metaphorical “baton” of the mission of God onto the Apostles.

Jesus is sent, his mission is done, and now Jesus is sending us like ‘little c’ *christs* into the world to proclaim his Gospel. To clarify, we all can proclaim the Gospel, but not all are called to **publicly bind and loose sin**, as we will see in my third point where:

**God is saving the world by:**

**3. Jesus instituting the *Office of the Ministry (or: Office of the Keys)*.**

<sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

What is Jesus doing here? What are we to make of what Jesus is saying?

There are a couple of interpretations. On one hand most protestants and Catholics would agree that these verses contain the Johannine “Great Commission,” content. In other words this serves as the culmination of the entire Gospel’s presentation of Jesus as the ***one sent from the Father*** (cf. on John 3:17) and now ***the Sent One (Jesus) has now become the Sender***, commissioning his followers to serve as his messengers and representatives (cf. 17:18). All three persons of the Godhead are involved in this commissioning: as the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends his disciples (20:21), ***equipping them with the Holy Spirit (v. 22)***. When Jesus **breathed on them** and said, “**Receive the Holy Spirit**,” it is best understood as a foretaste of what would happen when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost (see Acts 2). This does not mean that the Holy Spirit had no presence in the disciples’ lives prior to this point (see notes on John 7:39; 14:16–17) but rather Jesus is equipping them for a special task—the binding and loosing of sins.

On the other hand, vv. 22-23 are what separate mainline Churches from most other protestant schisms or low church views of the Office of the Ministry. I’ll explain.

The Lutheran view here is that Jesus is instituting what is historically understood as the **Office of the Keys**. That is;

*The Power to forgive or retain sins, delivered to the Church by Christ (Matt. 18:18 [John 20:21-23]). The exercise of such power was part of the life of the Christian community from its beginnings. The declaration of forgiveness came to be understood as representing not simply a judicial sentence, but as salvation and life itself.*

*Therefore the Office of the Keys, in the course of Church history soon to be **limited to ordained ministers**, is not simply absolution declared after confession, but also includes **every way in which the church bears the ministry of Christ**: [i.e.] preaching, teaching, celebrating the sacraments, and carrying on the conversation and consolation of the faithful.<sup>4</sup>*

In other words. Christ gave these keys to the Church corporately. That's every Christian. Every Christian can forgive sins on an individual level where people sin against them (i.e. the Lord's prayer "forgive us our sin as we forgive those who sin against us"). But the public proclamation of the forgiveness of sins to the Church and the World in the formal sense of the Church assembled is limited to the person ordained into the Office of the Keys. It is exercised on behalf of the Church, on behalf of Jesus Christ by an Ordained Servant of the Word (as it says in our LCA liturgy, p. 7). Only an Ordained Pastor can do this. It is very serious business because salvation is at hand, exercising authority of Christ, given to the Church.

In other words, there is no distinction between the forgiveness of Christ and his ordained servants. That is what we confess and believe as Lutherans.

What do I mean by this?

To put it another way. When you hear a sermon. The keys are being exercised. Sin is actually being forgiven in your hearing of this preached Word right now. Sin is being bound and loosed in teaching God's Word. Whenever the Ordained Pastor celebrates the sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) and/or whenever you confess your sins to a pastor, both individually or corporately—***you are absolved, the keys are being exercised, your sins are loosed. Your sins are forgiven.***

In one sense, it's easy to forget the weightiness of this Office and this command of Jesus. This is serious business with God. So serious, we are literally talking about salvation, Heaven being opened and closed to those who repent and those who do not. This is why our page 6 liturgy says these words. Check out page 7. Listen carefully to these Words. What God is saying to you, and you to God.

### ***Confession***

*I ask each of you in the presence of God who searches the heart:*

*Do you confess that you have sinned, and do you repent of your sins?*

***I do.***

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<sup>4</sup> Günther Gassmann, 'Keys, Office of the', *Hist. Dict. Lutheranism* (Lanham, Maryland, and London: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 170. Emphasis mine.

*Do you believe that Jesus Christ has redeemed you from all your sins, and do you desire forgiveness in his name?*

***I do.***

*Do you intend with the help of the Holy Spirit to live as in God's presence, and to strive daily to lead a holy life, even as Christ has made you holy?*

***I do.***

### ***Absolution***

*Christ gave to Church the authority to forgive the sins of those who repent, and to declare to those who do not repent that their sins are not forgiven. Therefore upon your confession, I, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God to all of you, and on behalf of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and Holy Spirit. Peace be with you. Amen.<sup>5</sup>*

Notice the very precise and specific language used here. There is no ambiguity about what we as a Church are doing here. We are encountering the living God and our sins are being absolved. Listen to these words: “strive daily to lead a holy life, ***even as Christ has made you holy***”, (in other words Christ has already saved you, you are already Holy, both saint and sinner. At once justified but your sanctification process is ongoing through confession and absolution) “***Christ gave*** the Church ***the authority*** to forgive sins”, (Jesus has done this. Jesus gave this authority. He gives it to the catholic Church. The Christian and universal Church) “***upon your confession***”, (because we are saints and sinners we still need to confess our sins to God almighty, cf. 1 John 1:9

*“But If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.) Upon your confession—“I as a ***called and ordained*** servant of the Word”, (Who ordains? You, the Church. Men of the Church are “prepared, examined and approved for this work”,<sup>6</sup> i.e. tested and ordained to serve the Church and exercise the keys in this Office), “***on behalf of*** my Lord Jesus Christ”, (not on my behalf, or on your behalf, or someone else’s behalf. No, on Jesus Christ’s behalf alone.) “***I forgive you all your sins***”.*

Just let the magnitude of this phrase sink in “I forgive you all your sins”.

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<sup>5</sup> Lutheran Church of Australia, *Lutheran Hymnal with Supplement* (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Pub. House, 1989), 7, emphasis mine.

<sup>6</sup> Lutheran Church of Australia, *Church Rites*, 139.

Do you know what this means? If you confessed that for the first time and believe in what Jesus has done for you, it means you are forgiven and you are a Christian by faith alone. And you should be baptized. Maybe join a catechism course, email me and we'll start catechumenate course. It means you are right with God. But those who are already baptized and are saved, as Christ has made you holy, you are renewing your promise to follow Jesus based on what he has done for you in his death. because we still are both saint and sinner until we die, we still fall into sin whether by accident or on purpose, we forget the Gospel so easily. Thus Christ institutes this office, so that your sins are forgiven by faith alone and the sacraments are administered in good order. As our confessions say. Article V, Augsburg Confession:

*[V. Concerning the Office of Preaching]*

*[1] To obtain such faith **God instituted the office** of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. [2] Through these, **as through means**, he gives the **Holy Spirit who produces faith**, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. [3] It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ's merit, when we so believe.*

*[4] **Condemned** are the Anabaptists and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit **without the external<sup>49</sup> word of the gospel** through our own preparation, thoughts, and works.<sup>7</sup>*

Notice. God instituted:

1. As through Means. "The Means of Grace" or also known as in the Book of Concord. The "means of the Spirit".

2. Condemned are those who believe and confess otherwise. Who believe without the external Word.

As I mentioned prior, not anyone can just do this in the Church. One must be called or have what the Lutheran Church calls "a proper public call". As it is written in our confessions:

Article XIV.

*[XIV. Concerning Church Government]*

*Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper [public] call.<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (p. 40). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

<sup>8</sup> Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the*



Even our Small Catechism talks about this Office of the Keys as foundational to our Lutheran Confessions. (*Read Small Catechism, Concordia Publishing Houses 2019 Ed. p. 314.*)

### **So how Does God Save the World?**

1. Jesus' Resurrection brings peace to all believers.
2. Jesus sending the Apostles (and by extension Jesus' sends us to our neighbours.)  
and lastly.
3. Jesus institutes the *Office of the Ministry (or: Office of the Keys)*.

Jesus sends the apostles and he is sending you and me.

### **Application**

So where is God sending you? Overseas? Interstate? To your workplace? To your home in isolation? To send a Gospel text message to that friend you love so dearly? To email or write a letter to that lost friend you never got to write back to? To that person who you know God has sent you to, or in one sense brought to you, to proclaim the beautiful Easter message of salvation and sins forgiven in his name?

Why should you repent and trust in this Jesus? What has he done?

### **Gospel**

Because this king was born **for you**.  
 He lived a righteous life, where you could not, **for you**.  
 He was circumcised on the 8th day **for you**.  
 He was baptized and ordained **for you**.  
 He was arrested during Holy Week **for you**.  
 Betrayed by his closest friends **for you**.  
 Falsely accused before Caiaphas and Pilate **for you**.  
 Beaten and mocked, spat upon **for you**.  
 Had a crown of thorns shoved into skull **for you**.  
 He carried the cross to Golgotha **for you**.  
 Was crucified and murdered **for you**.  
 And he was raised on the third day in the flesh—**for you**.

He did all these things, so that you wouldn't have to bear the judgment of God for your sins. Rather your sin has been **paid for by Christ**.

You are not saved by your obedience to God; you are saved by the mercy of God through his Son's horrific death and crucifixion **for you**. Jesus' righteousness by grace is yours through faith, and you receive it, **in your baptism**. That's where you objectively receive salvation. If I could put it in 'court-room language'. You receive Christ' righteousness **objectively—forensically outside of yourself**, God's righteousness through Christ comes to you **independently of you in the means of Grace**. In other words, you are **declared righteous outside of yourself and your justification is true for you even in times when we doubt and are troubled**.

This is what makes grace through faith so amazing.

How do you know for sure that you are saved? **You are absolved. You are baptized**. Clothed in Christ, objectively. Clothed and washed by his blood, when you were washed in the waters of baptism, all your sins are forgiven. God sees you and see' Jesus' righteousness in you. You are righteous and made right with God through his Son's death and in baptism you receive all the benefits of Christ's death in your baptism. You are adopted. You are justified. You received objectively the Holy Spirit, the sanctification process objectively begins. And you now have the ability to do what is right as God's Spirit is in you and you can hear the Gospel proclaimed to you in all its beauty with peace and thanksgiving—when you hear the words from an ordained Pastor, who speaks *impersona Christ*, (Latin: '*in the person of Christ*'), on Christ's behalf and by his command:

*"I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father  
and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Peace Be with You."*

**Amen.**

*May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts  
and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Lutheran Hymnal with Supplement, 29.*