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 Date: March 30, 2008 – Ascension Sunday  
 Title: The Power of the Cross  
 Text: John 20, 21  
 Theme: It is a resurrected living Christ who now empowers us to go forth into all the world and proclaim His name.

#### BIG PICTURE:

##### “Why I Need a Savior”

- John the Baptist – John 1 - “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”
- Nicodemus – John 3 - “You must be born again”
- The Woman at the Well – John 4 - “Sir, give me this water”

##### Our Savior’s Passion

- The Sign of the Cross – John 13
- The Humiliation of the Cross – John 19
- The Joy of the Cross – John 20
- **The Power of the Cross – John 21**

The period we are considering in our present study exists between His post-resurrection appearances and His ascension to the Father’s right hand. We need to complete the study as it is found in John’s record.

The resurrection of our Lord from death is not the end of the story. His resurrection from death and ascension to the Father is only the beginning of a never ending story. Today’s study is to remind us from John’s account the far reaching implications of the power of the cross.

#### **Its Eternal Value:**

To those who live in fear and are surrounded by darkness, we offer peace. God is for His people. The burden of guilt that assaults our senses has been removed. It is the power of His cross that is to wash over us and is to set us free.

#### **The Present Danger:**

There is always an ever present danger of professing Christianity and never really experiencing the power of the cross. Jesus is not foreign or far off. He is right here, right now. The text calls out to us to remember the very real and present person of Jesus Christ.

#### **Questions:**

1. What really happened at the cross?
2. Is this life transforming power still working in lives today?
3. Is this power mine?
4. To whom do you need to speak words of healing?
5. How can we show Christ’s love for the lost?

**To Know:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to know the power of the resurrected and ascended Christ.

**To Choose:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose Him as enough for this life and for the life to come.

**To Feel:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of resting in the power of His cross.

**How will they best hear?**

1. Like a crying child who reaches out for their parent in a night filled with darkness and fear, so Christ embraces and comforts His people who find themselves surrounded by darkness and fear.
2. The strength of our mission rests on the authority of a resurrected living Savior.

It is not enough for us to know He lives. We must know that in His visible and physical presence He has left us with power for life. There are six statements I would like to consider in this mornings study. All of them come from after His resurrection and before His ascension.

Often in reading the Scripture, we skim past great oceans of truth and thus fail to appreciate the height, depth, width, and breadth of what we just read. I believe John 20:17 is one of those untapped “oceans.” We begin with the power of His cross.

I. The power of His cross (John 20:17)

In the words of our Lord, something powerful happened because of the cross. The alienated become brethren, the orphaned become adopted and the wayward become worshippers. Jesus uses an Old Testament formula to speak of the relationship His people have to their God, “My Father and your Father, and My God and your God” (Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12 [‘I will also walk among you and **be your God, and you shall be My people**’]; Jer. 7:23; 30:22; Ezek. 36:28). “His words are reminiscent of Ruth’s words to Naomi: ‘your people shall be my people and your God my God’ (Ruth 1:16)” (F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, p.391). The language is that of the covenant made with Israel and promised to Israel. Let us not miss the slight alteration in our Lord’s expansion of this idea. Jesus identifies Himself with His people. Jesus includes us in His family. Let us for a moment recall the statement of our Lord in John 15:14-15.

<sup>13</sup> “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his **friends**. <sup>14</sup> You are My **friends** if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you **friends**, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:13-15).

He identifies His disciples not only as friends but also as brothers, family. “We may compare his words to the women in Matthew 28:10, ‘go and tell my brothers . . .’, where the reference (according to verse 16) is to ‘the eleven disciples’. Such

coincidences between Matthew and John are sufficiently rare to be particularly noteworthy when they occur" (F.F. Bruce, The Gospel of John, p.390).

He calls us "children." Such a word is one of "familiarity and affectionate kindness." He calls us "brothers and friends." We share a common Father. New Testament scholar Lightfoot correctly notes the distinction between His Sonship and ours when he wrote, "His Sonship to the Father is by nature and right, theirs is only by adoption and grace, in and through Him." (Lightfoot as quoted in Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, Rev., NICNT, p.743). This is what the cross does. This is its power. It restores fellowship, reconciles the distant, satisfies anger, declares righteous the guilty, and adopts the orphaned. There is nothing like the cross anywhere at any time. John continues with this idea in 1 John 4:17 when he wrote, "because as He is, so also are we in this world." Even Paul recognizes the unique nature of this union in two notable passages, Romans 6:2, 3 and Galatians 2:20.

<sup>3</sup>"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3, 4).

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20).

This is the often overlooked but potent power of the cross. We are a part of His eternal family. He calls us brothers. He signifies a common Father and a common God. We hold this in union with Him.

Consider also, it is to a woman the responsibility of the message to His disciples has been entrusted. "We should not miss the significance of the fact that these important messages were entrusted to women. Among the Jews, women were not permitted to bear witness (Mishnah, *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 1:8) (Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, Rev., NICNT, p.743). The scope of the family is inclusive. It is broad and sweeping as to who is included. This is Paul's point in Galatians 3:27-29.

<sup>27</sup> "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:27-29).

Truly, this thought is staggering. Are you beginning to see just how marvelous the cross is? I trust as you stand on the shores of God's ocean you are seeing just how magnificent He truly is. Let us not hold lightly the cross, let us not cheapen it with glib speech, let us muster up all the energy we can in speaking of the cross and seeing its shadow cast across the canvass of our lives.

Our Lord continues to drive home to His disciples the power of His cross.

II. The power of His peace (John 20:19, 21, 26; 21:12 ["Peace be with you, come and have breakfast"])

John uses the word for "peace" only five times in the Gospel. All other occurrences are used in the Upper Room Discourse (13-16 [14:27; 16:33; 20:19, 21, 26; 21:12]). It is the power of His cross that brings peace to His people. It is because of who He is and what He has done that we can have peace in the midst of our storms. Notice how in verse 19, "peace" is in contrast to "fear." Verse 21 repeats the greeting of calm giving it emphasis. Notice also the language of verse 26 where there is doubt and fear behind closed doors. Again our Lord appears and extends the greeting, "Peace".

"He gave them the normal everyday eastern greeting: 'Peace be to you.' It means far more than: 'May you be saved from trouble.' It means: 'May God give you every good thing'" (William Barclay, John, 2:272).

"'Peace be with you' is the usual Hebrew greeting (e.g., 1 Sam. 25:6). It is likely, however, that on this occasion we should see more in the words than a conventional greeting. After their forsaking Jesus at the time of the arrest the disciples may well have expected rebuke or blame. Instead Jesus pronounces peace on them" (Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, Rev., NICNT, 745).

"For the Greeks (as for us) peace was essentially negative, the absence of war. But for the Hebrews it meant positive blessing, especially a right relationship with God" (Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, Rev., NICNT, 584).

What I find equally arresting is that in the midst of great confusion of soul He says to His disciples, "Come and have breakfast." Do you hear what is being said? "Stop what you are doing and eat with me." "Be still and know that I am God."

"There was something quite unfamiliar in the company of one who had returned from the dead. But he put them at their ease, inviting them to come and share the breakfast which he had prepared for them" (William Barclay, John, 2:402).

Everything about our passage communicates a grace and mercy that is truly supernatural in origin and expression.

III. The power of His commission (John 20:21)

Our Lord uses two different words in the verse for send. His intent is to use them as working synonyms. He is saying the same thing although He is using two different words for send. It is a living Christ who empowers them to carry out His mission.

A.T. Robertson's Word Pictures makes the following observation:

"Jesus has often spoken of the Father's sending him using both apostellô and pempô. Here he employs both words in practically the same sense. Jesus still bears the Commission of the Father (perfect active indicative). This is the first of the three commissions given by the Risen Christ (another on the mountain in Galilee [Mt 28:16-20; 1Co 15:6], another on the Mount of Olives [Lu 24:44-51; Ac 1:3-11])."

"As I was sent to proclaim the truth of the Most High, and to convert sinners to God, I send you for the very same purpose, clothed with the very same authority, and influenced by the very same Spirit." (Adam Clarke's Commentary)

"It is only because he has thus accomplished his mission, and indeed precisely because he has accomplished it, that they are sent into the world. The link between his mission and theirs is emphasized" (Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, Rev., NICNT, 747).

There are two ideas in this commission.

A. Christ "needs" the Church.

God could have willed to do what He desired in any way He chose, but He willed to work in and through His body, the church. As verse 23 will point out, we (the church) are His feet and His hands that take Him to His people and embrace them in the name of Jesus.

"The Son's mission in the world is entrusted to them, since he is returning to the Father; but as the Son had received the Spirit in unrestricted fullness for the discharge of his own mission (John 1:32-34; 3:34), so they now receive the Spirit for the discharge of theirs" (F.F. Bruce, The Gospel of John, 391-92).

B. The Church needs Christ.

In the absence of His power, His plan, and His presence, the Church will fail. This is the point of Matthew 28:18-20. You and I, as His body, are to make disciples whenever and wherever we find ourselves.

IV. The power of His Spirit (John 20:22, 23)

In light of the commission before us He gives us what is necessary to carry out His desire.

"He breathed on them (enephusêsen). First aorist active indicative of emphusaô, late verb, here only in NT, though eleven times in the LXX and in the papyri. It was a symbolic [act] with the same word used in the LXX when God breathed the breath of life upon Adam (Genesis 2:7). It occurs also in Ezekiel 37:9." (A.T. Robertson's Word Pictures)

It is the Holy Spirit who works in us and through us the life of Christ. He is the one who gives us the power to confront those who sin against Christ and His Church (Matt. 18:19) and who animates us as ambassadors of the gospel (2 Cor. 5:20, 21).

Because of His commission and the power of the Holy Spirit the church is able to proclaim forgiveness to all who believe the gospel. It is with certainty we can say, "Jesus saves" and that "Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone."

"The two passives - 'they are remitted' and 'they are retained' - imply divine agency: the preachers' role is declaratory, but it is God who effectively remits or retains. The servants of Christ are given no authority independent of his, nor is any assurance of infallibility given to them" (F.F. Bruce, The Gospel of John, 392).

The church has no existence or life apart from or independent of Jesus Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We must never forget John 15:5, "for apart from Me you can do nothing."

We often fail to affirm His acknowledged role in our lives. Thankfully our negligence does not translate into His absence. It is the cross and our Lord's ascension to the Father that leaves in His wake the Holy Spirit (John 16:7).

#### V. The power of His appearances (John 20:14, 19, 26; 21:1, 14)

The word "manifested" in 20:1 is used eight times by John. It is used of Jesus manifesting Himself and through His actions He manifested the Father (2:11; 9:3; 17:6; 21:1, 14). Our Lord shows Himself openly to those who have eyes to see.

Think about the four occurrences in 20:14, 19, 26 and 21:4 of Jesus standing. Jesus is suddenly standing in the midst of His disciples. Each time He appears; confusion, fear, and misunderstanding exist. Why does the text include this slight, but interesting detail? The text assures us that in the midst of our heartache, helplessness, and hopelessness Jesus stands ready to comfort, encourage, and embrace. He shows Himself powerful in our midst. He is with us and He will never leave us or forsake us (Matt. 28:20).

It is through His appearances after His resurrection and before His ascension that moves Luke to write the following statement in Acts 1:1-3.

<sup>1</sup> "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. <sup>3</sup> **To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God**" (Acts 1:1-3).

His appearance assures us of His presence.

## VI. The power of His instruction (John 21:15-19)

Just as Peter denied our Lord three times, so our Lord approaches Peter with a singular question asked three times. The richness of this passage warrants serious study and it is not my intent to divulge the depth of its meaning. However, I would like to direct our attention toward the two commands left with His disciples through the tender, but direct interplay between Peter and our Lord.

All of the following feed my sheep and follow me are in the imperative mood. The imperative mood is the statement of command whereby the recipient chooses to act. Our Lord gives Peter two directives.

### A. Feed my sheep – look after my people (vv. 15-17)

The structure of our Lord's instruction to Peter overlaps and grows. The New American Bible captures this idea with the following statements:

- 1] tend my lambs (v. 15)
- 2] shepherd my sheep (v. 16)
- 3] tend my sheep (v. 17)

To the elders of His church, He calls them to feed His sheep. To the flock of God, He calls them to love one another (John 13:34, 35). I am always concerned that we make things harder than they are.

The dialogue with Peter was to assure him of restoration after a very public and horrific fall. Our Lord assures Peter that all claims of love are empty in the absence of simple obedience. Jesus basically says to Peter, "Peter, I do not care so much by what you say as to what you do, take care of my people." The same is true for us. Our words mean very little if they are not supported by simple acts of worshipful obedience.

In this directive we are also to see that Peter, although a miserable failure, was still usable in leading the flock of God.

### B. Follow me – learn from me (vv. 18-19, 22)

This particular word is used throughout John to describe those who follow Jesus (1:37, 38, 40, 43; 8:12; **10:4, 5, 27**; 12:26; 21:22). Sheep follow the Shepherd. The call to follow is universal and non-negotiable. Those who profess to be sheep but do not follow the Shepherd need to examine themselves as to whether or not they are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5, 6). My intent in saying this is to encourage you in your pursuit of Christ and not to raise doubt.

This is where we live today, right now.

APPLICATION: (What's the NEXT STEP?)

1. Do you know the power of His cross?
2. Are you finding rest in the midst of your storms?
3. Although I believe the directive to feed the sheep is more elder based, for us as a congregation we might rightly ask, "Whom are you encouraging?"
4. Let us stop talking about our love for Jesus and start showing our love for Jesus by loving those who sit right next to us. Our love for one another is a clear declaration of the power of His cross. May we not forget this, may we forever live this.