

Easter Sunday **Life-Giving Hands (Jesus)**

JOHN 20

¹⁹On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you! Just as the Father has sent me, I am also sending you.” ²²After saying this, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³Whenever you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”



On her way out the door of the coffee shop, she ran into a classmate she hadn’t seen for years. Within moments they were visiting as though no time had passed, until her friend asked, “So how’s life?” Her mind raced to think of a way to deflect the question, because honestly her life was a mess. She was separated from her husband. She worked a job she hated. Even though her kids never said it directly, she felt like they blamed her for the marriage problems. That made her time with them less than fulfilling. She was scared. She was angry. She felt trapped. This wasn’t the life she imagined, and she dreamed about running away from it all, starting over, and really living life.

Sometimes it’s the idealism of youth. Sometimes it’s a midlife crisis. Sometimes it’s burnout from the 40-year grind of work and a readiness to embrace the golden years. But we all go through those cycles where we feel as though it’s time to start *really* living. People tell themselves they need go backpacking through Europe, buy an overpriced imported German convertible and cruise up and down the Pacific highway, or spend your golden years cruising the Mediterranean. These adventures, they try to convince themselves, will help them *really* live. They will “suck out all the marrow of life” as Henry David Thoreau said. But when those same people return home from their feel-good trips and realize their souls still feel empty, they still wonder what it means to *really* live.

The Bible has something to say about *really* living, and it doesn’t involve a backpack, a BMW, or the BMV. Christians need no midlife crisis or end-of-life burnout to trigger a life worth living. They just need Easter. They need the

empty tomb. They need the happy shouts, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed.” They need Jesus Christ’s appearance to the disciples in the upper room, showing them His **Life-Giving Hands**, and then explaining to them that Easter gives them a life worth *really* living.

The disciples in the upper room might as well have been walking out of a coffee shop, because they were acting like their lives were a mess. John tells us “**the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders**” (v. 19). If the Jews were so underhanded and corrupt as to orchestrate the crucifixion of an innocent man, what would stop them from coming after his disciples next? Seventy-two hours earlier, they abandoned Jesus and fled from the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus was arrested. Peter disowned Him, just as Jesus had predicted. Despite the fact that Jesus had been preparing them for months for his upcoming death, they still seemed genuinely shocked and surprised as they watched Him die on the cross Friday afternoon. They were acting like Jesus was dead, and their lives weren’t worth living. They were afraid. They felt guilty. They were trapped in that upper room.

Knowing full well their agitated state of mind, Jesus wanted to calm their nerves and bring them peace. He didn’t lead with, “How’s life?” but said, “**Peace be with you**” (v. 19). It was still Easter. They had seen the empty tomb. They heard the reports of the women and the Emmaus disciples, but they hadn’t seen Jesus with their own eyes. They weren’t completely sure what to make of the day’s events. So Jesus came and stood in their presence, He showed Himself alive in person, and then gave His stupefied audience a moment to grasp the full value of His bodily presence. “Guys, it’s me! I’m not a ghost, and I’m not dead. I’m standing right in front of you, very much alive.” “**After he said this, he showed them his hands and side**” (v. 20). Christ’s bodily presence, together with the sight of His life-giving hands, convinced the disciples that they were looking at their resurrected Lord. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed.

Friends, we have the witness of the women. We have the Emmaus answer. “**We also have the word of the prophets more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place**” (2 Pet. 1:19). This world is a dark place; it’s filled with doubt and disappointment, guilt and grief, punishment and pain, death and despair. This world is so dark that it often makes us want to join the disciples in the upper room with the doors locked in fear! On Good Friday, the whole world went dark when God laid on Christ the

iniquity of us all; Jesus suffered the anguish of all the ugliness and darkness of this evil world.

But today marks three days from Friday. It's Easter, and Christ is alive! It took them a moment, but the disciples finally grabbed hold of the meaning of Easter that evening—it is joy! **“The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord”** (v. 20). Not sinful fear, but Easter joy makes life *really* worth living. Have you grabbed hold of Easter joy? The gloomy hopelessness of the world died on Good Friday, and so did the darkness of sin and all the nagging guilt. Easter not only means joy, but peace; **“God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting their sins against them”** (2 Cor. 5:19). Jesus conquered sin, He defeated the devil, He rose from the dead. He's alive! This Easter, grab hold of Jesus' life—His life makes your life *really* worth living. Along with Jesus, peace follows joy into your soul.

The easy part of Jesus' visit is done. He showed himself alive. Jesus had more in mind that Easter evening than to show the disciples His life-giving hands. Easter peace and joy were not just a static thing, a private state of mind and soul without words or deeds to follow. Jesus spoke next about how His life-fulfilling hands connect directly to our life-giving mission. **“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! Just as the Father has sent me, I am also sending you’”** (v. 21). The Father had sent Jesus from heaven on a mission to forgive sins, to redeem the world. Jesus didn't just hear the word of God, He did what his Father said! In the same way the Father sent Jesus, He now sends us. He takes disciples (followers) and transforms them into apostles (those who are sent out to proclaim). **“He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us”** (2 Cor. 5:19,20). Serving as Christ's ambassadors! That's a life *really* worth living.

The nobility of Jesus' call to serve is outpaced only by its scope. What a big job! You sense the disciples might have been overwhelmed. After all, within moments of Jesus' appearance, the disciples had gone from terror-filled hiding to Easter peace and joy, then they were commissioned and sent out into the world as Christ's ambassadors. Jesus added that they wouldn't go alone; they'd be serving with the power of the Holy Spirit. **“And with that He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’”** (v. 22). What the disciples received was much more than the Spirit-given gift of faith. The Holy Spirit empowers and enables each of us to carry out God's call, **“As the Father sent me, I'm sending**

you" (v. 21). Fifty days later, the Holy Spirit came so powerfully on these disciples that He turned uneducated Galilean fishermen into apostolic fishers of men. After hearing Peter's sermon, 3,000 souls were added to the Christian church that day.

Jesus even trained the apostles in the message they would proclaim. **"If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven"** (v. 23). It's a significant day when parents give a child keys to the house, and an even bigger milestone when they hand over the keys to the car. With these words, Jesus confidently hands every believer the keys to heaven. Forgiving sins or withholding forgiveness from those who reject Christ or are plainly impenitent is the same as opening and closing the door to heaven. The keys are the special power and right Christ gives only to Christians. Forgiving sins and announcing peace is what Jesus did on Easter when He showed the disciples His life-giving hands. What better way to live Easter daily than to use our hands for God's life-giving purpose—to forgive our brothers and sisters! What can be more meaningful than forgiving the sins of the spouse from whom I'm estranged? Reconciling with a coworker or a member at church? Resolving differences with an old friend? Remember, keys are valuable only when you use them. Then use them—that's why God gave them to you! Living at peace with God and your neighbor makes life *really* worth living.

Those disciples thought they had nothing to live for. They acted like Jesus was dead. Miraculously Jesus appeared in their presence on Easter and showed them his life-giving hands. Then he sent them on his life-giving mission, empowered by the Holy Spirit with his forgiving keys. Today there are more than two billion Christians scattered around the world who owe a debt of gratitude to the church's humble beginnings that Easter evening.

So how are you? Are you stuck? Do you think you've got nothing to live for? Stop acting like Jesus is dead, because he's not. Look again at his life-giving hands. Jesus is alive! Let's act like it. Let's pray like it. Let's believe like it. Let's embrace his call, **"I am sending you"** (v. 21), and bring the gospel to the other five and half billion people in our world one soul at a time. Let's receive his Holy Spirit and use the keys to proclaim peace. Live life like there is no death, because Easter means there is no death. Easter makes life *really* worth living. Amen.