

“On the 8<sup>th</sup> Day, God commissioned...”

John 20: 19-31

Here we are-and we can tell this Sunday's a little different from last week. Traditionally, this Sunday has been known as “Low Sunday”. I've always wondered if the Church was just trying to be nice when it came up with that title for this Sunday, just trying to be nice when it came up for a reason for this very odd Sunday. Maybe the Church was thinking that after such a high from Easter, we would all be a little worn out and would need some down time or maybe the Church thought that what goes up must come down- some sort of like a candy crash, possibly like the crash after the sugar high we all experienced last week from eating all the jelly beans and chocolate bunnies. But I think in reality, the church is just being honest. It's a low Sunday because that is what it is, a low attendance Sunday. Even usually the preacher takes this Sunday off. After all the craziness of Holy Week, usually the preacher asks his or her associate to preach so that the preacher can come down off the high of Easter and get some rest.

And let's face it. This is also a low attendance Sunday because the people have already heard the good news of the resurrection and what else is there? The resurrection is the heart of the good news. Once we've heard it, we don't just

forget it. So why do they need to come to church the following week if they have already been told the good news?

And if that is part of the reason attendance is so low on this Sunday, there is the good possibility that people, even regular every week church going people, may also be thinking-“Where’s the challenge for us as people of faith now that Jesus has overcome death? If Jesus died for us, then it’s all good. We don’t need to do anything else. Death is no more. There is new life. Nothing is really needed from us now. Jesus did all the hard work. So we can just sit back and bask in the glow of the resurrection.

Well, if that is our way of thinking now that Easter is over and there is nothing left for us to do, then really why do we come to church after Easter, after the empty tomb, after the good news? Why come to church at all? If there is nothing else really needed from us here on earth, then why give up our Sunday mornings, our Wednesday nights, our Tuesdays for Bible Study, or Saturdays for mission work? If Jesus did all the hard work, then why call us ourselves the Body of Christ? If Easter morning took care of everything, then where is the challenge for our faith? What is the challenge that is going to keep us interested, that is going to keep us coming back for more? What is the one thing that is going to get us passionate and working for the Kingdom of God here on earth? If Jesus did all the work, why does God need us? Maybe that’s the real reason there is such low

attendance on this Sunday. The excitement of Easter is over. And there is nothing new. There is nothing to challenge us, to get us excited about the Kingdom of God here on earth. Jesus did it all and we can sit back and enjoy, right?

And if almost to stress this point even more, the lectionary unfairly gives us a very familiar text for today, a text that certainly doesn't challenge us, a text that we have heard time and time again, a text that we could almost recite by heart. We know this text by many names but the most familiar is the text about "Doubting Thomas". You know what I am talking about. We've heard it so many times. It has been explained to us in almost every way possible. We've heard preachers say that doubt is bad so don't be like Thomas. We've heard preachers say that doubt is good so be like Thomas. We've heard it all. We know this text.

So really where is the challenge for this Sunday? What is there to keep us coming back after Easter? Even us regular church going folk find ourselves asking, what's the challenge for us a people of faith? If Jesus did all the hard work and all we are going to get is the same old story about a guy who doubts, where does that leave us?

That's what I was thinking at the beginning of this week. When I saw what the text was, my first thought was Oh No! Not this again! Not Doubting Thomas! What do I have to say that hasn't already been said by me or by some other

preacher for that matter? This poor guy has been doubted to death. What am I going to bring that's new to the table?

So I began my usual sermon preparation as always, spending time in meditation with the text. And suddenly I realized God was doing a new thing. Suddenly, I realized that on the eighth day, God was commissioning Thomas and the disciples, just like on the eighth day, which is today, God is commissioning us, is sending us out into the world. That on the eighth day, God is telling us that the resurrection is just the beginning of the story and that it ain't over until God says it's over.

I invite you to turn to John 20

(Read text) Message version.

What struck me as I was reading this text was that whole "eighth day" part. I had never heard that before. So I started doing a little research, refreshing my memory about the whole eighth day part in Jewish tradition. I knew that on the eighth day, in Jewish tradition, newborns are usually taken to the temple or synagogue to be dedicated. I also knew that on the eighth day in Jewish tradition, newborn males were circumcised as a mark of God's covenant with God's people. And I also knew that on the eighth day, there was a connection to priestly ordination. I knew that part of this whole "eighth day" thing in the Jewish tradition is that the eighth day is a day of gratitude, a day of offering, and a day of service.

But I still thought to myself-what does this have to do with the same old familiar story about Thomas? What does John mean when he says that Jesus came back on the eighth day, eight days after the empty tomb, eight days after Mary said I have seen the risen Lord, eight days after Jesus first showed up to his disciples behind locked doors? What does the eighth day, a day meant for service and gratitude, mean for us as people of faith, people who are looking for a challenge after Easter, people who are wondering what's to keep us interested, people who are wondering where do we go from here , now that we have come down from our Easter high?

I wasn't sure that I had any answers yet. And I was beginning to worry that the Holy Spirit was sending me down some weird rabbit hole but I just couldn't let go of the whole "eighth day" part? Why is this detail important? What was John trying to tell us?

So I dug up a little bit more research about the eighth day tradition. And I discovered that in the Jewish tradition, the number eight has come to symbolize release, release from the desires of this world, release to focus on God's kingdom. The number eight according to Jewish tradition symbolizes release, release from all the things that hold us back from fulfilling God's covenant as people of faith, release from the things that block us from seeing the vision of God's Kingdom here on earth, release from all the things that keep us from becoming the people

that God created us to be. I had come to discover during my sermon preparation that the eighth day was a good thing because it meant freedom. It meant opening ourselves to new possibilities. It meant having a vision beyond our earthly world, beyond locked doors, beyond distrust, beyond doubt.

But I still wasn't sure that I had found my answer. I couldn't help asking myself why is this important? How does this eighth day, a day meant for release, a day meant for new vision, a day meant for new possibilities relate to us as people of faith, people who are wondering what's next, what's new, people who are wondering now that we've experienced the Risen Lord, where do we go from here?

What does John mean when he says that Jesus came back on the eighth day, the eighth day after Easter, the eighth day after his initial meeting with the disciples, the eighth day after giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit? Why is the eighth day so important to this story?

So I took another look at the text. "On the eighth day, Jesus came and said Peace." Now that has a familiar ring to it, doesn't it? It reminds us of the creation story. On the first day, God created and it was good. On the second day, God created and it was good. On the third day, God created and it was good. On up to the seventh day, where God rested. But what about the eighth day? The Bible never tells us what God does on the eighth day. Surely God doesn't just step away

from the world after the seven days and leave it spinning all on its own? That's not what we proclaim to believe as Kingdom people. We believe that God is still creating, that God is still renewing, that God is still restoring God's creation to wholeness. So if we believe all these things, what do we believe happened on the eighth day? What does God do on the eighth day?

And it is in the asking of that question, that we realize something wonderful. Jesus comes back on the eighth day and starts something new. He gives the disciples a new vision of God's Kingdom here on earth. He gives the disciples a new mission, calling them to work on establishing God's Kingdom here on earth. On the eighth day, Jesus comes back and empowers his disciples to go.

John is saying that on the eighth day, God begins creating again and on the eighth day after Easter, after the experience of new life, God is creating again. Sure the Bible doesn't tell us specifically that but we also know that God has never left us alone. God never stepped away from God's creation. So it only makes sense that in the beginning, after God rested, God began creating again. So it only makes sense that after the disciples rested, God began creating again through them, through their words, through their actions. Jesus comes back and begins a new vision, begins a new mission for God's creation here on earth. And it only makes sense that after we, as the Body of Christ here on earth, have had a chance to rest, that God is also beginning to do something new through us, through our words,

through our actions. That God is giving us a new mission, that God is giving us a new vision of God's Kingdom here on earth.

That's why the eighth day is so important. It becomes a day of release for the disciples. It becomes a day of service for the disciples. It becomes a day of empowerment for the disciples. Just as it does for us.

The thing we have to remember is that Jesus came back on the eighth day, renewed God's covenant with God's people, and showed the disciples his wounds. And in doing so, God began creating again, began healing the wounds of the world again, began sharing the vision of God's Kingdom on earth once again. On the eighth day, Jesus showed his wounds to Thomas and said now it's your turn. It is your time to do something about the wounds of the world. It is your time to go and begin creating God's Kingdom on earth!

And that's when I knew I had my answer. That's when I realized what John had been trying to tell me all along. The eighth day is so important because it is the day that God begins creating again. That's day that we as the Body of Christ here on earth are released from all the things that block our vision from really seeing God's Kingdom in our midst. That's the day that we as the people of God are released to become the people God created us to be and to spread the good news. Today, the eighth day is time that God is creating God's Kingdom here on earth using the disciples, using Thomas, and using us as people of faith.



What John has been saying all along is that sure the resurrection happened. Sure death does not have the last word. Sure Jesus did all the hard work but his part is done. Now it is up to the disciples. Now it is up to us. Now it is our turn as the Body of Christ here on earth. It is our turn to enter into the creative process with God and begin healing the wounds of the world, to begin sharing a kingdom vision, begin a new mission of proclaiming the good news that Love wins every single time. Now is the time for a new beginning. Now is the time for a new creation. Now it is our turn to go and say that the resurrection is only the beginning of the story!

What John is telling us is that the wait is over! The wait is over for the disciples and the wait is over for us as people of faith. The Holy Spirit is here and we are empowered to go. We are released to serve. We are called to enter in the creative process with God and start sharing the gift of new life.

You see, this story is John's Pentecost story. Unlike for Luke, the disciples don't have to wait fifty days to receive the Holy Spirit. They are receiving it now. They are receiving it on the eighth day, the day that God begins creating again, the day that God begins doing a new thing, the day that God re-establishes God's covenant with God's people once more.

John is telling us that the disciples have had eight days to come to terms with the news of the resurrection. John is telling us that the disciples have had eight

days to let the good news of Jesus' resurrection sink in. The disciples have had eight days to come down off that Easter high and just when they were beginning to wonder what to do next, Jesus showed up. Jesus showed up and told them that it was time to get moving! Jesus told them that they had had enough time for joyful retreat. Jesus told them that they had had enough time to sit in fear. Jesus told them that they had had enough time to worry and wonder. And Now was the time to get moving! Now was the time to start creating! Now was the time to start spreading the good news, to start sharing our kingdom vision where all of God's people are welcomed to the table, to start our new mission in a new reality, a reality where God is still working, where God is still creating, where God is still challenging us to stop thinking about ourselves and begin thinking about others. Just like he is showing up today and telling us the same thing!

The eighth day, a day of gratitude, a day of offering a day of release, a day of sending out, the eighth day was upon the disciples in our story and the time to start to get to work was upon them. And the same holds true for us today. The eighth day of Easter is upon us. And it is time to get to work. "Because on the eighth day, the world looks to you and me to take the first steps to turn the passion of Christ into compassionate change". Because on the eighth day, today, the world looks to you and me to take the first steps and join in the invitation to enter into the creative process with God and to begin to heal the wounds of the world. Because

on the eighth day, today and all days, the world looks to you and me to accept the challenge of being Easter people all the time and not just one day a year.

On the eighth day, God began creating again. On the eighth day, Jesus came and empowered his disciples to go out in the world and share the good news. And today, on the eighth day, God is still creating here on earth. The Holy Spirit is sending us out as the Body of Christ here on earth. The Holy Spirit is pulling us up from our low point of worry and wonder, and telling us that we are released, released to out go in the world and to share a new vision, to share a new mission, to share the good news that Love will always win.

On this eighth day and all days, we are invited to join in the creative process with our God and begin creating God's Kingdom here on earth for all of God's people now and forevermore. On this eighth day and all days, we are empowered to go out and spread the good news. On this eighth day and all days, we as the Body of Christ are called to remind the world that the resurrection was just the beginning of the story.

May we rise up from our wondering and realize that today and all days, we are called to be Kingdom people, that we are called to share the news that love will always win, that we come back to church, to our communities of faith each and every week, each and every day, because God has not said that it is over. God has said it is only the beginning. Amen.

