

This past week has been a tough one for sports fans in our area and even around the country. Monday, the day after Easter, we learned that the long time broadcaster for the Phillies had died of heart disease and later on the week John Madden announced his retirement.

Harry Kalas, had been with the Phillies for 39 years and was well loved in the city. He was also the voice of NFL films, located right here in Mt. Laurel. Tributes from around the country poured in, with comments like he is in heaven now with Richie Asburne, playing golf and the like.

Whether or not that is true, I will let the Lord be the judge. What I do know is that his father was a Methodist preacher. But they tell us that Harry was a typical PK – preacher’s kid – and that he was rather rebellious. We do not know whether he ever even heard the gospel or even responded to it. You might ask, what does that have to do with the Easter Season that we are in?

As you know, prior to the events of this week, we celebrated the most glorious day of the Christian calendar — Easter — the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. We said that it was such an important day that among other things, it changed the Sabbath from the last day of the week to the first day of the week — Sunday.

I said that the resurrection is the hinge on which Christianity swings — Simply — without the resurrection there is Christianity. If Jesus is still dead — then there is no purpose for us being here — and all that we do is useless.

We looked briefly at all the proofs of the resurrection and one of the other proofs that we looked at was the fact that it was the resurrection that changed the Apostles from a group of frightened men into the greatest evangelistic team that the world has ever known... that it was the resurrection that caused all of them — with the exception of John — to die a martyrs death for Christ.

In our Gospel lesson from this morning we saw this aspect — that is, the fear in the Apostle’s life immediately after the crucifixion of Jesus — we read in John 20:19: *“Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews...”*

This was the day of resurrection — it was Sunday, the first day of the week — three days after the crucifixion of Christ — and this group was group assembled in the upper room — the place of the Last Supper. The group was probably more than just the Apostles. It included the women and those others who had followed Jesus. They had heard, but only a few had seen the resurrected Jesus. We know that at the tomb there was Peter & John, Mary Magdalene and a few others — they had seen the empty tomb and the risen Savior.

But now they were all gathered in the upper room and Jesus appears to them: 20:19: *“Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.”*

Remember that most had deserted Jesus — Peter had clearly and strongly denied Jesus — and they thought that it was all over — and Jesus comes in with some great words of comfort — *“Peace be with you.”*

Thinking about this for a moment — they were in a locked room, hiding — and all of a sudden Jesus is there with them — they had to be a bit frightened. But Jesus reassures them with his words — *“Peace be with you”* — and then he shows them that it is really him — 20:20: *“When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”*

But then he says those words that will literally change the world — 20:21: *“So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” — “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”* I like the way the King James says it — *“as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”* — *“even so send I you.”*

We are usually familiar with the Great Commission that we find recorded for us in Matthew 28:18-20: *“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.* I want you to note clearly here that Jesus did not say go and make converts, he said *Go therefore and make disciples* – that is, those who would follow him.

Even in Acts 1:8 just prior to our Savior’s ascension, we read: *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

And an even fuller version — if you will — in Luke 24:44-49: *“Then He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me. And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”* Notice the words — *“and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things...”*

The Gospel of Mark has the great commission also – that’s how important it is. All four gospels and the book of Acts.

But here in our Gospel lesson we see the simple words — *As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.* Not only that, but we see that here our Savior begins to equip them for the task that he has just given them — 20:22: *“And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”* — This was a precursor to the Holy Spirit that would be fully poured out on them on the Day of Pentecost.

On the night of our Savior’s betrayal and arrest — as Jesus prays in the garden of Gethsemane — among the things that he prayed for were his disciples. As he concluded his prayer for them he prayed: John 17:18: *“As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.”*

God sent Jesus into the world — we think of the familiar John 3:16,17: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”*

We know that this is the purpose of the coming of Jesus — we know that this is the purpose of his life, death, resurrection — to save God’s people.

But... but — people need to know about it — and that’s where the disciples came in — and that’s where every Christian who has ever lived comes in. Someone who knows who Christ is, has to tell others.

You see, you can have the best product in the world... you can have the best restaurant in the world... you can have the best of anything in the world — but if no one knows about it — and no one buys it... or goes there — it is useless. Jesus came into the world to save the world — but people need to know why he came and what he came to do.

And he gave the job to those who know who he is to tell others — *As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*” We have talked about it before — we have looked at a variety of passages — but it all comes down to this simple fact — *As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*”

Those to whom God has revealed himself to are those who have to tell others about Jesus Christ. We have been called by God for a purpose — to tell others the good news of the Gospel. As they say — it is not brain surgery or nuclear physics. It is simply being a witness to what God has done in our own lives.

I find it very interesting that some of the first words that Jesus said to the assemble Apostles and the few others gathered there are words that tell them what they are to do — *As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*”

Now, this was nothing new for God’s people. Those whom God has chosen to know him were always to be witness for him. In Deuteronomy 4, as the children of Israel are about to enter the promised land, God reminds them of what he has done for them — he says: “*Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?*”

The children of Israel, by virtue of who they were, and their obedience to God’s law — were to be witnesses to what God had done for them. And then in Deuteronomy 6, after reminding them of the 10 Commands again, the people are instructed in these words: “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*”

Why were they to do this? As a witness to their families and to those around them. God reminded them that they had been redeemed from the land of Egypt — they were taken out of the house of bondage — and this was to a controlling factor in their lives — God did not want them to forget it and he wanted them to be witnesses of this fact to others .

My friends — as Christians we have been redeemed — redeemed by the blood of the lamb. Our sins have been bought and paid for by Jesus on the cross of Calvary. Therefore it should be privilege for us to tell others — not a burden. *As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*

Sometimes it won't be easy. God's servants and witnesses have always been persecuted — just read Hebrews 11 for some of the O.T. saints who were killed for their faith. As I've already said, so were the Apostles and early Christians — and Christians throughout the ages have been persecuted. And it goes on today — in increasing fashion. You realize that it is against the law for Christians to witness in Muslim nations – that they can be executed for witnessing.

But this is nothing new. Jesus said in John 15:18: *“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.”*

For most of us — we will not go through that type of persecution. The most that we will go through is ridicule and belittling.

But it does not matter — we have been commissioned by the Savior himself — we have a command from on high — *As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.* It is something that we have to do.

There are many different ways to do it. One of the easiest ways is to be consistent in your Christian life. As others see a difference in you, they might ask why. And you can tell them the simple truth – that Jesus came, lived, died and rose from the dead for the sins of those who believe in him. This is why it is important to tell others – because without Christ, people are dead in their sins and open to the wrath of God.

We also need to remember that Jesus empowered his Apostles and early followers with the Holy Spirit — that is what enabled them to go out in his name. The truth is that we have that same spirit within us that will enable us to do the same. Because, *As the Father has sent Jesus, He also sends us.* Let us remember and obey these words — *As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*

Think of those who don't know Christ, and pray that God would give you the opportunity to tell them about Jesus – the only mediator between God and man.