

2019-04-21 ... 6.30pm Easter Evening ... Revd Canon Judy Hunt

John 20: 19 – 23

**'Easter and Pentecost Responsibility'**

**Introduction ...**

**'Two for the price of one'** were you tempted by that kind of offer for Easter Eggs?

It's a common offer for all kinds of things.

And there's a sense in which it applies to our New Testament reading this evening: **John 20: 19 – 23**

**Brings Easter and Pentecost together ...**

John here gives us **'two for the price of one'**. He combines what we usually think of separately:

**Easter + Pentecost**

The Resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit

The frightened disciples ...

The appearance of the risen Lord ...

The showing of his hands and his side ...

The reassurance of peace ...

and then the Easter joy!

In John's Gospel this is combined with **'Receive the Holy Spirit'** which follows on from being commissioned :

**'As the Father has sent me**

**so I send you ...'**

I want to come back to this fusion of Easter and Pentecost later – but first to consider the unnerving words of Jesus that come in verse 23:

**Forgiveness – or not ...**

**'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them;**

**if you retain the sins of any – they are retained.'**

As Trevor Dennis wrote on this passage:

**It is unnerving talk, because it seems to place such frightening authority into the hands of human beings that we will almost certainly mis-use, and that indeed, we already have. And more seriously still, it seems to set limits on what is – after all – not our forgiveness – but God's.**

So what is going on? What interpretation should we place on these words of Jesus?

It's helpful to link this with the next chapter – **John 21**. Do you remember – in another resurrection appearance – after breakfast – Jesus takes Peter aside and asks him three times whether or not Peter loves him. Peter is required to make a threefold statement of love and allegiance in order to receive forgiveness for his threefold denial. The forgiveness is there ... but the sins are not 'dealt with' until repentance is experienced and expressed.

Maybe that is the key to understanding Jesus' words about the **'retention of sins.'**

**PTO**

## Responsibility ...

So back to our **'two for the price of one'** thoughts on this short passage from John 20:

Easter + Pentecost

Resurrection + the Holy Spirit's coming

There's one other pairing to make: **Joy and Responsibility for Mission ...**

This is more clear in John's gospel than any other from the first resurrection encounter and onwards.

Earlier in this chapter – Mary Magdalene's joy in seeing and speaking with Jesus was quickly followed by her being sent to tell the others.

In tonight's passage we have: **'Peace be with you'** – twice from Jesus, and that the disciples rejoiced, but we also have: **'As the Father has sent me, so I send you'** ...

Back to Trevor Dennis:

**'Peace be with you.'**

**The greeting is designed to do more than offer reassurance. It is meant to give courage and energy for the task ahead. It is meant to spur them into getting up, unlocking the doors and going out into the streets of Jerusalem and beyond ... If they remain behind their locked doors, the resurrection will mean nothing.**

## Conclusion ...

And so too for us ... Just as we must link Easter Day with Good Friday ... or Easter has a superficial frothy fun feel – with chicks and bunnies ... so we must also link Easter Day with Pentecost ... not even **'two for the price of one'** – but **Three interlinked Festivals** ... all about the redemption and transformation of the world ... the victory of love, justice and peace over hatred, corruption and violence.

Amen.