



John 20:19-31
Year B





Easter is a triumphant reversal and vindication of Christ's suffering and death, no question. But no Easter text begins triumphantly. In fact, [Mark's original chapter 16 cliffhanger](#) ends with the urgent question of what will happen next. In today's reading, we drop into that place of fear where Scripture left us last week.

John 20:19-31 picks up with the disciples after they heard Mary Magdalene's story of the empty tomb (John 20:1-2), after Peter and John ran to the scene and saw the empty linen cloths (v.6), after Mary shared her encounter with the risen Jesus with the group (v.18). Now, it is evening. The disciples wonder: *If what they say is true, what will happen to us? Is this Messiah who we deserted and fled from going to enact payback? Are we going to be even more exposed?* They lock the doors, and the risen Christ walks right through them and appears among them.

Beyond just showing up, the risen Christ brings the disciples Pentecost. He offers the group peace (not fear or

anxiety or disappointment) before breathing the Holy Spirit on them and sending them out from the room: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (v. 21-22).

For a long time, I harbored a grudge, if that is possible, against the hymn “I, the Lord of Sea and Sky,” better known as “Here I Am, Lord” (GTG #69). To me, it represented all that is wrong in our decadent, self-indulgent 21st-century Christianity. We are much more interested in our personal call and feeling special than the work of Christian community, the life of discipleship. To me, a virtue of life together in Christ is that the movement becomes self-forgetful. It exists beyond mountaintop moments, which are wonderful but fleeting.

Yet, like many things in life and in the life of faith, my attitude has (somewhat) changed toward “Here I am, Lord.” On my desk, amid lists and calendars and paperwork and urgent messages, I keep a couple of reminders about what I believe to be the heart of ministry and discipleship. One of these mementos is a quotation from Karl Barth in 1948: “One never is a Christian, one can only become one again and again: in the evening of each day, somewhat ashamed about one’s Christianity of the day just over, and in the morning of each new day, glad that one may dare to be one all over again, doing so with solace, with one’s fellow humanity, with hope, with everything. The Christian congregation is of one mind in that it consists of real beginners.”

Easter rarely finds us at the front of a triumphant victory parade. Instead, it finds disciples gripped by fear and anxiety and completely unsure of what will happen next. This second Sunday of Easter, Easter continues to disrupt us and find us in darkness, in defeat, in sadness, in a million broken pieces, in a mourning woman weeping at a tomb, with disciples hiding in fear, anxiety, and despair with the doors locked and the lights off. Into this barren emptiness and these broken lives, Jesus Christ shows up. Jesus Christ calls the disciples again, not to stay where they are or as they are, but to become: to become church, to become a community, to become a body of people raised up by the risen Christ and sent out and into the commerce of the world.

So back to “Here I am, Lord.” Perhaps we sing it not just to celebrate a mountaintop moment but to remind ourselves that we are called by God, at the beginning and at the end and every moment in between. We, like the disciples in John 20, are called to leave the security of locked doors, closed minds, and walled edifices, to leave the safety of status and preferred cultural norms so the Holy Spirit can send us into the world God loves.

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (v.21).

“I will go Lord, if you lead me” (“Here I am, Lord”).

The crucified and risen Lord is relentless and never stops calling us and sending us. May we answer and may we go, again and again — and again.

Questions for reflection

1. Have you ever felt like the disciples at the beginning of John 20:19-31? Did Jesus show up in your locked room? How so?
2. How can the church be a place that celebrates individual mountain-top experiences while also calling for a self-forgetful movement?
3. When you read that we are called “to leave the security of locked doors and closed minds and walled edifices, to leave the safety of status and preferred cultural norms ...,” what do you think of? Are you feeling called to leave something behind, to enter something new? Is there something the church should leave behind? What is one step towards this movement?