

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." St. John 20:21

+ I've got some really good news: it's congregational participation time. So, if you can, please finish the following phrase:

'What happens in Vegas ... [...stays in Vegas.]'

Now, I've never been to Vegas, so I'm no expert on what happens in Vegas. Maybe you are. And, if the saying is true, those of us who'll never get to Vegas will never know what happens there – that is, if those who have been to Vegas are able to it all secret. 'What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas', as that incredibly successful advertising campaign tells us.¹

But what do you think about these variations on that theme? Do you think that I might have a career in marketing? Let me test them on you.

For example: 'What happens in Jerusalem stays in Jerusalem.'

Or 'what happens in the tomb stays in the tomb.'

Or 'what happens in the upper room stays in the upper room.'

Maybe not quite as catchy as that Vegas thing, eh? Well, perhaps marketing is not my future. But the real problem with my variations on the Vegas theme isn't that they're not catchy. The real problem is that they deny everything that the Resurrection stands for.

In spite of the challenges of trying to describe an experience unlike any other, all of the Resurrection accounts are perfectly clear about one thing: that seeing Jesus risen from the dead changed the lives of his disciples forever. In that moment everything completely changed. So much so that they were compelled to immediately share the good news with others. They became, in the words of this week's Epistle, 'witnesses' of eternal life.

Mary Magdalene sees the empty tomb and immediately runs off to tell the other disciples. After that, she speaks to the risen Christ, and he immediately sends her back to tell the others that he is alive. The disciples on the road to Emmaus recognise Jesus in the breaking of the bread; and when he suddenly disappears, they rush back to Jerusalem to tell the others. Jesus appears in the upper room; and after he's gone, the disciples immediately tell Thomas, who wasn't there at the time.

Over and over again the results are exactly the same. Those who see Jesus risen from the dead cannot keep the news to themselves. It's so completely life changing that they have to share the news. So, perhaps my not-so-catchy marketing

¹ In 2003, advertising agency R&R Partners developed the slogan *What Happens Here, Stays Here* for the Las Vegas, Nevada tourism department. Featured in wildly successful commercials, the slogan may have been in part inspired by the phrase *what happens on tour stays on tour*, a phrase with roots in traveling English sporting teams. When on tour and away from their partners back home, players could live liberally with the tacit understanding that none of their teammates would rat them out upon return. With their slogan, R&R stated they wanted to convey that feeling of freedom that visitors to Las Vegas feel when gambling and partying there—the feeling that they could be whoever they wanted be while there and then go back to their lives afterward like nothing had happened, no sins need be confessed. The slogan soon became more commonly known as *what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas* or as the shortened form *what happens in Vegas*.

should instead go something like this:

‘What happens in Jerusalem can’t stay in Jerusalem.’

Or ‘what happens in the tomb can’t stay in the tomb.’

Or ‘what happens in the upper room can’t stay in the upper room.’

In this week’s Gospel we again hear of how the Risen Jesus breathed on the disciples and invited them to ‘receive the Holy Spirit’. Now for us, that should set off alarm bells, because it recalls the story of Creation where God breathed life into Adam. And it recalls the imagery of this week’s Old Testament Lesson, from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, where God breathes life into those dry bones stacked up in the valley. In other words, just as God once breathed life into lifeless bodies, so Jesus now breathes the Holy Spirit’s life into the exhausted and frightened and defeated and broken disciples. So, in that way, it’s the beginning of an entirely new Creation, when our story of human failure is turned by God into an entirely new story; when Jesus Christ, on our behalf, undoes all of our past failure. Every last bit.

That’s the message of the Resurrection. That God in Christ has rewritten our story: your story; my story; humanity’s story. That God is breathing new life into His Creation through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Your story and my story, both the old and the new, both the past and the future, are being completely rewritten.

But even as Christ is reordering Creation in the middle of a darkened fear-filled room, he challenges his disciples to start living the story that he’s rewriting. He challenges them to model a kind of resurrected life; not just the same old life that they’d always been living but something radically new. He speaks to them of how they are to be models of forgiveness; of how they are to go out into the thick of the world where sins need to be forgiven: the world with all of its shame and fear, with all of its horror and corruption, its brokenness and sorrow; where unresolved anger and impatience and bitterness shape and distort every element of life.

So what happens to us when we really believe that Jesus has risen from the dead? Not just the ‘head and lips’ kind of believing, where we know the right words to say; but the ‘whole life’ kind of believing; where the right words transform everything that we do. Are we willing to be the kind of disciples who let go of our fears; who let go of our doubts; our resentments; maybe even our unforgiven unreconciled sin?

We’ve had the forty days of Lent as a time to reflect on what it means to follow Christ to the Cross. Are we ready to use the 40 days of Easter, until the Feast of the Ascension, to think about the implications of being part of God’s new creation; to think about what it means to be part of the way in which God is rewriting the world’s story? That’s what we’re called to be. To be part of the way in which God is breathing life into the dry, dusty, lifeless bones of a tired, frightened, greedy, selfish, and broken world.

So in a world where bitterness is so often the default position in our relationships, what difference can we make by modelling reconciliation, by living forgiveness, as part of that Easter re-creation? And in a world where fear drives us to look for security and peace in the kind of things that can never offer us either, what role can we play by modelling trust in the power of God to hold us close to His heart?

Peace and forgiveness. That’s what Christ spoke of on the day that he rose from the dead. Peace and forgiveness. That day in that dark upper room. And this day in us.