

**Sermon**  
**St. Mary Nanoose Bay**  
**April 2, 2017 - LENT #5**  
**John**  
**“Sent” / Lazarus**

This past Friday one of my friends told me wistfully, “I never seem to be called on to support others. Maybe I’m not a very good friend.” And yesterday, I learned from her that late that same night, she had been woken up by a phone call from someone who said, “I’m in trouble, I need someone to talk to and you are someone I trust.”

How quickly prayer can be answered!

This week is the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent and today we end our exploration of the shape of the liturgy with the last action – “Sent.” At the end of each Sunday liturgy, we are sent out with words such as “Our worship has ended, let the service begin,” or “Go out into the world to love and serve the Lord,” to which we say, “Thanks be to God.”

When I first started attending church, I was confused by these words. I thought church was all about personal redemption. That people came to church to be fed and to attain some kind of spiritual equanimity. I hadn’t realized that there was mutuality to the liturgy; to the work of the people gathered. I missed that final and key part. I That our worship together prepares us for the rest of our week. It’s interesting to note that the word “Mass” which is how Roman Catholics refer to their Eucharistic celebration comes from the same root word as “Dismissal” which means “to be sent forth.”

Once a week we come together to give thanks to God for the life we are given, to be encouraged and nourished, and then we are sent out to share all that we have been given: our hope, our faith, our sense of abundance.

Last week, we read from the gospel of John about the blind man who was healed. Jesus made a paste from dirt and saliva and spread it on the man's eyes and told him to bathe in the pool of Siloam. In the text we are told what the word "Siloam" means. Do you remember? It means "sent." So thank you John for this segue into today's sermon!

As we are being healed, which for the blind man was a one time event but for most of us happens over time, we are sent out to share the good news – to inspire others, to encourage, support and journey with others. Even when we don't see clearly yet, we are called out into service.

To hoard the good news is against the nature of love. To be loved, and to allow that love to inform your very being is to be caught up in the dynamic of love – which is the sharing of love, without condition, without fear and without control.

We are sent into the world to share what we ourselves have been so fortunate to receive.

We can try and hide. We can try and hoard. But God's nature is to reach out, to call out to our dry, hard natures and breathe life into us. And we, in turn, like Ezekiel, are called to call others to life.

In our reading about Jesus raising Lazarus to life, we hear this theme of calling out and then sending out. How does Jesus bring

Lazarus to life? He calls him by name. "Lazarus, come out!" And Lazarus responds.

God calls forth life in the Creation story with His word. And today in the gospel reading, Jesus calls Lazarus back to life with His word.

Jesus calls Lazarus back to life so that "for the sake of the crowd standing here, they may believe that you sent me." We need to hear Jesus word in order to believe. The Word is meant to move us, not explain the workings of God to us. Too often we attempt to read Scripture as a way of understanding God's mind and hearing God's word as directing us in very specific ways. No, the word of God is meant to move and change us, not give us knowledge or information to use to defend ourselves or justify ourselves. The word of God is meant to change our hearts and minds so we become more Christ-like, more compassionate, more trusting.

So as the shape of the liturgy outlines - we are called to **offer** up our lives; acknowledge the many ways that we are **blessed**; accept our **brokenness** and allow it to be transformed; enter into the endless divine cycle of receiving and **giving**, and then we are **sent out** to share the transformed people we become each time we partake of communion.

Brother James who led the clergy retreat this year told us, "Worship has the power to change us and the world." He challenged us to consider living Eucharistically.

**Offering, Blessed, Broken, Given, Sent** – we enter into these sacred mysteries every Sunday; every time we participate in the Eucharistic liturgy.

And if we live our lives Eucharistically, we engage this pattern of worship every day... eyes open to the mystery and power of God working in our lives, accepting the good times with the difficult ones. Not attached to our own preferences, not resisting the events of our lives but engaging with whatever God sets in our path. Responding with the best of our ability with open hearts. It's work. It takes practice. It requires grounding in prayer. And it's a very different way of perceiving life. This is the kind of life Jesus is calling us into. This is the kind of life that the bread and wine, the body and blood we will receive sustains. This is the kind of life that takes faith and belief. The kind of life John is telling us about with all his wonderful stories and mysterious and marvellous images of our relationship with God; how intertwined we are if we only we really knew.

And just to throw a wrench into the works, I know the focus word for today is "Sent." But I've also used the word "called." Because it shows up in today's scripture readings repeatedly. And as I have been reflecting over the week, the word "Called" and "Sent" are similar. But there's a difference between the two words that conveys a subtle and powerful idea. When I say the word "sent," there's the sense of being sent out, sent *away*. When I say the word "called," isn't that different? Don't you picture someone out there in the unknown, calling you forward, calling you *towards* them? It's more of a drawing

towards than a sending away. That image gives me a better sense of “being with” and being able to trust and go along. As in, being called home by a loving parent, or being called out to be with a dear friend.

We do not determine where we will be sent, but listen carefully for Jesus calling us out to share the good news with those who are put in our path, in our lives.

We are sent out each Sunday to respond to others, not knowing what impact our words and actions will have. All we can do is be faithful to God’s call. And the fruits of our faithfulness may not be seen even in our own generation. We leave that to God.

We can wonder where God will send us. And like my friend who wondered why she hadn’t been called on more to support others, had her question answered that very night!

The more we practice listening, the more we are able to learn to trust the Call. And the more we learn to listen and trust and act, the more we live in God’s service. And living in God’s service expands the circle of healing in the world.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.