



MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church
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<https://aulc.us>

TITLE: Another Apostle?

SERMON IN A SENTENCE: Just as Jesus said to those first disciples, "So I send you," so also he says to us, "So I send you!" (John 20:21)

SCRIPTURE: John 20:1-18

Hello friends! Welcome to the AULC Ministries Easter Sunday message! I am Doctor Rob White, the Senior Minister here and I am happy that you could spare a few minutes out of your busy weekend to be with us!

A quick note for those who might be looking for sermon notes to go back and look at some of the scriptures talked about in our sermons, we are now attaching a complete transcript of each sermon to our sermon videos on our web site. You can find these at aulc.us.

Let's open in prayer:

Dear Lord and Heavenly Father, we come together today to celebrate your resurrection and to remind ourselves exactly what the Easter Season really means. We ask that you help us to always remember this and not just a few days every year. We all lead busy lives nowadays and it seems that there is never enough hours in the day to do the things that seem important at the time. Let us always

remember to take the time out of each and every day to be in touch with you and always keep you first in our lives. We ask this in your son, Jesus Precious Name. Amen.

Our scripture lesson today comes from the Gospel of John Chapter 20 verses 1 to 18.

Starting at verse 1:

Holman Christian Standard Bible

The Empty Tomb

- 1 On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.
- 2 So she ran to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put Him!”
- 3 At that, Peter and the other disciple went out, heading for the tomb.
- 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first.
- 5 Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying there, yet he did not go in.
- 6 Then, following him, Simon Peter came also. He entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there.
- 7 The wrapping that had been on His head was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a separate place by itself.
- 8 The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, then entered the tomb, saw, and believed.
- 9 For they still did not understand the Scripture that He must rise from the dead.
- 10 Then the disciples went home again.

Mary Magdalene Sees the Risen Lord

- 11 But Mary stood outside facing the tomb, crying. As she was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb.
- 12 She saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet, where Jesus’ body had been lying.
- 13 They said to her, “Woman, why are you crying?”
- “Because they’ve taken away my Lord,” she told them, “and I don’t know where they’ve put Him.”
- 14 Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not know it was Jesus.
- 15 “Woman,” Jesus said to her, “why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”
- Supposing He was the gardener, she replied, “Sir, if you’ve removed Him, tell me where you’ve put Him, and I will take Him away.”
- 16 Jesus said, “Mary.”
- Turning around, she said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!”—which means “Teacher.”
- 17 “Don’t cling to Me,” Jesus told her, “for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to My brothers and tell them that I am ascending to My Father and your Father—to My God and your God.”
- 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them what He had said to her.

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His Word!

How many apostles were there? Twelve, of course. Matthew lists their names (see Matthew 10:2-4). There were the big names, like Peter, James and John. There was the bad apple, Judas. There was the doubter, Thomas. There was the tax collector, Matthew. There were several about whom we know practically nothing. Quite a motley crew!

But Jesus chose these twelve to be his apostles. They traveled with him while he was alive, and after his death he turned over the whole enterprise to them. He trusted these apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to carry on his work—to spread the Gospel—to build the church.

Jesus chose twelve apostles to parallel the twelve tribes of Israel. Twelve was a more-or-less holy number among the Jews.

But there weren't always twelve apostles. After Judas betrayed Jesus, he killed himself, leaving only eleven. Dale Bruner, a Christian writer, says of the eleven apostles, "The number 'eleven' limps." That's true, isn't it! After Judas' death, we occasionally hear of "the eleven" in the New Testament. Each time we hear "the eleven," we are reminded that there should be twelve.

So after Jesus' resurrection, the apostles got together to choose a successor to Judas—to bring the number back to twelve. Peter outlined the qualifications.

- First, the person had to be someone who had been with Jesus from the beginning.
- Second, the person must be a witness to the resurrection—must have seen the risen Christ (Acts 1:21-22).

The apostles had two candidates to replace Judas, and God helped them to choose Matthias (Acts 1:26). So once again were twelve.

But later, there was Paul, who saw the risen Christ in a vision on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9). Then there were thirteen.

Then Luke (the author of Acts) refers to "the apostles Barnabas and Paul" (Acts 14:14)—so apparently the early church considered Barnabas to be an apostle. So then there were fourteen.

And then Paul refers to "James, the Lord's brother" as an apostle (Galatians 1:19). So then there were fifteen.

So at first there were twelve apostles—then eleven—then twelve again—and then thirteen with the addition of Paul—and then more—all men.

But in my study for this Easter sermon, I learned that the Eastern Orthodox Church regards Mary Magdalene as *isapostolos* (pronounced is-a-POS-toe-los)—equal to the apostles—because Mary had

been with Jesus from the beginning—AND she was the FIRST witness to the resurrection—the FIRST to see the risen Christ—AND the FIRST to be given a commission by the risen Christ.

Jesus told Mary Magdalene:

**"Go to my brothers,
and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father,
to my God and your God.'" (John 20:17).**

I don't want to carry it too far. I don't want to say that Mary Magdalene was an apostle, because the Bible doesn't say that she was. But I think it is wonderful that in that patriarchal society—that man's world—Jesus honored this woman to be the FIRST to see the resurrected Christ and the FIRST to receive a commission to spread the word.

It's especially wonderful, because Mary Magdalene had been a flawed woman. She had been demon-possessed—inhabited by seven demons—but Jesus had cast out those demons and restored her to wholeness (Mark 16:9).

It's important to remember Mary's story on Easter, because Easter is about God taking a hopeless situation and turning it around—redeeming it.

- That's what Jesus did when he cast out Mary's seven demons. He took her hopeless situation and turned it around.
- That's what God did on Easter. He took a hopeless situation—a dead man—a corpse—and he turned the hopeless situation around—brought Jesus back to life—opened the tomb—and set the stage for the salvation of the whole world.

So on that first Easter, Jesus chose Mary Magdalene, one of the many hopeless people whom Jesus had helped, to take word to the disciples (who had given up hope) that they no longer had to settle for hope. With the resurrection, Jesus leapfrogged over hope like a pole-vaulter. Hope is the expectation that something good WILL happen—but Jesus sent Mary to the disciples with the Good News that something wonderful HAD ALREADY happened. So the disciples could go straight from Despair to Joy without even having to pass through Hope.

But the disciples didn't "get it" immediately. They had been in hiding since Jesus' death—scared that the men who killed Jesus would come after them next. But Jesus came to the disciples in that locked room—came through the locked door—stood in their midst and said, "**Peace be to you!**"—and then showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. Then the disciples were finally able to believe—and to rejoice.

- Then Jesus said once again, "**Peace be to you!**" (John 20:21).

- And then he said, "**As the Father has sent me, EVEN SO I SEND YOU**" (John 20:21).

"SO I SEND YOU!" That was the beginning. Those few unimpressive disciples, empowered by the Holy Spirit, were to take the message of the risen Christ to the rest of the world. They were to spread the word of the risen Christ to all those places that we find so difficult to pronounce—Parthia and Phrygia and Pamphylia (Acts 2). They were to spread the word to Egypt and Rome.

Later, disciples who followed after them would spread the word even further—to Europe—England—Scotland—Ireland—the Americas—Korea—Australia—New Zealand—Fiji—South Africa—Zimbabwe—and a thousand other places.

In some places, tyrants tried to stomp out the Gospel, but it spread anyway. The more oppressive the place, the more determined people were to hear about freedom in Christ. The darker the place, the more anxious people were to see the light of Easter. And so the faith spread.

The faith is still spreading today—and there is plenty of room to keep it spreading. In our own community, there are many people living lives of quiet desperation:

- Some are trying to put a spark in their lives by using alcohol or drugs.
- Some are trying to feel good by buying bigger houses or cars or boats.
- Some are trying desperately to climb the corporate ladder, but have their ladder propped against the wrong wall.
- Many wonder if anyone loves them—and the answer all too often is that no one does.

You can multiply that times ten thousand and get an idea of the scope of the problem in this nation. You can multiply it by a million and get an idea of the scope of the problem worldwide.

As Jesus said in another context,

**"The harvest indeed is PLENTIFUL,
but the laborers are few"** (Matthew 9:37).

And so Jesus said to MARY, "**Go to my brothers**" (verse 17 of our scripture text today). Start spreading the word!

And so Jesus said to those FIRST DISCIPLES—the ones hidden in that locked room, "**As the Father has sent me, EVEN SO I SEND YOU**" (John 20:21). In other words, start spreading the word!

And so Jesus says to US, "**EVEN SO I SEND YOU.**" Mary Magdalene did what Jesus told her to do—she went to those disciples huddled in that locked room and told them about seeing Jesus. But Mary's voice has long-since been stilled. Now it's our turn.

Those disciples eventually came out of their locked room and began preaching wherever they could find a synagogue or a soap-box. But their voices have long-since been stilled. Now it's our turn. Jesus says, "**EVEN SO I SEND YOU.**"

Where does Jesus want us to go to tell the resurrection story this Easter morning? The answer will be different for each person.

- He might be calling you to invite your neighbor to church.
- He might be calling you to get involved in the work of this church—to teach a Sunday school class or sponsor a youth group or help in the kitchen.
- He might be calling you to go on a mission trip.
- He might be calling you to help someone who is hungry or homeless, because helping people in need is a witness for Christ.
- He might be calling you to pray for someone at your workplace.

There are a thousand different ways that we can spread the Easter message this morning. Pray for guidance, and then listen to hear how Christ would guide you.

Let me conclude with this story. In his book, *Sources of Strength*, Jimmy Carter tells about a Cuban pastor named Eloy Cruz. Carter observed that Cruz seemed to have a special touch with poor immigrants. Carter saw Cruz connect with person after person. He always had the right word to say—just the right touch. Invariably, people walked away from their encounter with Pastor Cruz just a little stronger—just a little more hopeful—just a little better prepared to face life's challenges.

Carter asked Cruz the secret of his success. At first, Cruz was embarrassed—but then he thought for a moment and was able to answer Carter's question. He said:

"Senor Jimmy,
we only need to have two loves in our lives.
For God,
and for the person who happens to be in front of us at any time."

Easter is the story of God's love for us. We will be able to spread the Easter story if we will have those two loves in our lives—love for God and love for the person who happens to be in front of us at any time.

Consider the sunrise on Easter morning. As darkness gives way to light, it symbolizes the victory of life over death. Just as the sun rises each morning, signaling the start of a new day, Jesus rose from the dead, ushering in a new era of hope and redemption for humanity. The sunrise reminds us that even in our darkest moments, there is always the promise of a new beginning. This Easter, let's embrace the dawn of hope and renewal that comes with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This Easter, let us ask God to show us how he would like us to serve. And as we listen for the answer, let us resolve to love God—and to love the person who happens to be in front of us at any time.

That's our Lord's Message for this Easter Sunday and I hope you got a blessing out of it!

Go out this week and be a blessing and be blessed. For the more you are a blessing, the more you will be blessed!

Thank you all for watching and listening and we will see you all next week!