

A Savior Who Can Walk Through Locked Doors

John 20:19-31

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Easter isn't over yet! That is a statement worth pondering. Eastertide is a season. That's why the assigned (or suggested) lectionary readings for the Sundays following Easter continue to tell the resurrection story from several angles. The Church teaches our faith by what we leave out as much as by what we say. So if we only mention Jesus' resurrection one Sunday a month, the world blows it off as either a fairy tale or at best, a minor doctrine. But consider this: If Jesus was not raised from the dead, nothing matters anyway. If he was, nothing else matters!

If you read our text carefully, you'll see the balance--both the continuity (Jesus is the same; he has physicality) and Jesus is different (he has been raised; he just shows up in a locked room). Here's the point: Closed doors are no hindrance to the Risen Christ! In one of Oscar Wilde's famous plays, "Salome," King Herod hears reports that Jesus of Nazareth has been raising dead people. Herod says, "I do not wish him to do that. I forbid him to do that. I allow no man to raise the dead. This man must be found and told that I forbid him to raise the dead" [*Surprised by Hope*, N.T. Wright, p. 75].

Some of us had the opportunity this week to hear reports from God's work in Eastern Europe. Officials sometimes forbid believers to teach children about Jesus. So, the believers prayed. And then, the unthinkable happened. Someone came to the church and said, "The government has told us we are to provide a summer children's camp but we've never done this before. You have. Will you put on the camp so we will not be in trouble? You may teach anything you wish. There will be two camps, with 150 children each." The Risen One simply cannot be locked up!

In both vv. 19 and 26, notice that fear caused the believers to shut or lock the doors. Fear does terrible things to us. Neuropsychologists tell us that anxiety is a toxin which actually corrupts the brain and leads us to depart emotionally and physically from others and self. What is the answer to fear? Three times Jesus says to them, "Peace" (vv. 19, 21, 26). This more than "Yo!" or "Howdy." It is God's wholeness, God's provision, spoken by the One who had announced at his birth, "Peace !" and who stilled the storm by declaring, "Peace." And notice that the same greeting of peace is offered to those locked up by fear or by doubt (v. 26).

But Christ's resurrection is not about making us feel good; it's a summons to mission (v. 21). You see, first there is comfort (peace), then there is commission (so send I you). What is our central power in mission? The Holy Spirit (v. 22). The Holy Spirit will always be nudging us out of our safety, our comfort and our own ideas. A church open to the Spirit of the Risen Christ will be surprised. Following Jesus will be anything but boring!

We recently went to see the movie, "Insurgent." It's a science fiction thriller about a post-Apocalyptic world in which all people are controlled by being forced into factions. All through the movie, they are told to stay inside the walls. There is nothing but danger and destruction beyond them. But at the end of the movie, they are told the truth, something we need to hear, "The world is waiting with hope for you...beyond the wall." I think about Mission JC, coming April 26. Leaving the building to serve. Risking change. Just as the Risen One cannot be locked out, so he cannot be locked in--in the church house! The Risen Christ does not stay boxed up in a building (v. 21). The world is waiting with hope for you...beyond the wall.

But I've saved the best part until now. The Risen Christ comes through the locked doors, and did you notice? He comes for us! In vv. 19, Easter evening, he comes after the frightened disciples. A week later, v. 26, he comes specifically after Thomas, the doubter. He seeks us! The Apostle Paul would use the language, "I have been apprehended by Christ...I have been arrested by Christ..." (Philippians 3). When our oldest daughter was tiny, we would play peek-a-boo with her. She would stand in plain sight and cover her eyes. In her childish way, she thought that if she couldn't see us, we couldn't see her. That's the way we are. Hide in a locked room. If I don't think about God, God won't think about me. Buzzzzz! Wrong! I heard recently the testimony of a man who was running from God so earnestly that he would not go to a wedding or funeral, for fear God would speak to him. The Risen Christ can come through the locked doors of our hearts.

I could tell you about a man who was running from God's call to preach. He was in high school and didn't want to commit to the ministry just yet. His church was having a revival meeting, but he was able to avoid attending because of school play rehearsals. But he forgot about Sunday morning! And that's when God called me to the ministry, in that worship service. You see, the Risen Christ can just show up in a room with locked doors. You just never know!