

4/8/2018

## “Behind Closed Doors”

Scripture: John 20:19-31

**Theme: The risen Christ Jesus comes to us behind the “closed doors” of our minds and hearts and offers us peace and assurance that he lives, even if we don’t see him with our eyes, or touch him with our hands. He gives strength and power by the Holy Spirit to those who believe and live alive as his disciples.**

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vyDRZVXc9Y>

Someone has said that what goes on behind closed doors should stay there. Well, that may be true in most cases, but I’m glad that Saint John the evangelist, the so-called “beloved disciple” of Jesus, wrote and told what happened behind closed doors the evening of the day on which Jesus the Christ had resurrected from death.

Last Sunday we heard of that wonderful miracle of the stone covering the tomb, where Jesus had been laid to rest, being rolled away by God. That stone had been placed there by others, the Roman guards, to keep the disciples of Jesus out and the dead body of Jesus in. We said that God rolled that stone away himself or by using an angel, so that Christ’s disciples could see that his body was already raised from death. And, that likewise, God can roll away the obstacles that circumstances or others place in our lives.

As we hear from the gospel this morning, the disciples of Jesus were gathered there behind closed doors for fear of the Jews – that is the ruling Council, called the Sanhedrin (which had called for the crucifixion of Jesus on the grounds of blasphemy and treason - John 18:19-19:16), and the Judeans from Jerusalem and the surrounding area. In fact, many translations, including the NIV, say that the doors were locked (that is bolted shut). After all, the risen Jesus had appeared to only a handful of them up to that point. And, they still did not know what to do next, or what would come of them.

In this case, it was the disciples themselves who closed and bolted the doorway.

And just like those disciples who were huddled there in the Upper Room, **there may be times or circumstances in your life or mine in which we feel afraid of what will come next, even when we know that there is some word of hope.**

**The good news is that the risen Christ Jesus comes to us behind the “closed doors” of our minds and our hearts and offers us peace and assurance that he lives, even if we don’t see him with our eyes, or touch him with our hands. He gives strength and power by the Holy Spirit to those who believe and live alive as his disciples.**

† **Maybe you are facing new possibilities after enduring a difficult experience or time in your life.**

But, perhaps you fear the uncertainty of the near or distant future.

It could be a budding new relationship, but you may have lost a loved one or had a heartbreaking

experience before, and the fear of someday losing someone else keeps you from risking getting closer to that person. Let the Spirit and love of the living Christ come into your heart and remind you that you are never truly alone. Then, you will be able to freely risk entering a new relationship.

It could be a new job or career possibility, but the thought of starting over in some new field seems too difficult. Let the assurance of the living Christ's presence and strength encourage you to move forward with strength.

For some young people, it may be looking to the future after graduating high school or college. You may not be sure what direction your life is taking, or where you really want to be in five or ten years.

You may even find at any age that you have a special calling from God.

Jesus said, ***"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*** *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit".* (vs. 21-22) Remember that as he gave the apostles the Holy Spirit, so he gives it to you -- to accomplish that which is in God's will and purpose for you.

It could be learning to forgive yourself and others as God does.

Jesus said to his apostles, ***"If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*** (vs. 23) He may have been speaking specifically to the apostles about declaring sins forgiven through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. But, we know from the Lord's Prayer that Jesus taught us how important it is for each of us to forgive those who have wronged us personally. And, in many ways, holding on to the hurt and pain of those wrongs only serves to bury or reopen those old wounds and scars. They won't truly be healed until we have forgiven others of them.

And, in the same way, we must ask forgiveness from God and others, and receive it at least from God. We must learn from our mistakes and let them go. Then, they will truly serve to make us better children of God.

Or, perhaps you live behind a closed door, afraid to share something as personal as sexual orientation, for fear of judgement or exclusion by others. Though we may not all agree on all of life's expression, we are called to acknowledge that all are created in God's image, and to love unconditionally as God loves us.

Whatever your situation or circumstances, do not worry about it. Look at the apostle Thomas. He wasn't too sure about anything it seems. You may remember that at the Last Supper, as John's gospel tells us, Jesus tried reassuring the disciples by telling them, ***"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. . ."*** and that he was going to prepare a place for them and would come back to take them to be with him, saying, ***"You know the way to the place where I am going,"*** He was referring mysteriously to heaven. Thomas at least had the courage to say, ***"Lord, we don't know where you are going; how can we know the way?"*** (John 14:1-5)

After Jesus is raised from death, Thomas is honest about his doubts. John tells us that Thomas was not present with the others the first time Jesus appeared in the Upper Room that first day of the week. And, when the others told him, what did he say? . . . ***"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."***

(vs. 24-26)

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked again, Jesus came and stood among them and said, **“Peace be with you!”** Then he said to Thomas, **“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”** (vs. 27)

† The point is that **Jesus comes to us even behind the locked doors of our minds and hearts, while we are still afraid or doubtful of the future. And, he tells us not to be afraid or without faith, but believe and trust in him.**

Someone has written of *Faith and Doubt*:

*Doubt sees the obstacles, Faith sees the way;  
Doubt sees the blackest night, Faith sees the day;  
Doubt dreads to take a step, Faith soars on high;  
Doubt questions, “Who believes?”, Faith answers, “I.”*

(Stories for a Faithful Heart, Guideposts, 2000)

You may be facing a chronic or debilitating disease or condition, which will require a new lifestyle of eating and other activities. You may be afraid of what the doctors or others will tell you. You may be afraid of your physical or mental limitations, of what you will or won't be able to do.

. . . Any of these conditions and others can cause us to want to get into a room somewhere and close the door, maybe even lock it, so that others can't come in.

**We may want to hide behind closed doors, because of fear and doubt.**

Like the first disciples of Jesus, we may be afraid. We may be afraid of other people – what they think, say or do that might hurt our feelings, our standing with others or our sense of security in some other way. We may be uncertain or afraid of what life may bring or the changes that may be necessary when it does change.

But, just as Jesus came and stood among the disciples, he comes to us. Remember again the words that he used to greet them . . . **“Peace be with you!”** He comes and greets us with those words, as well. He reassured them that it was indeed him, and that he was alive by showing them his wounds in his hands and side.

And what was their response? “The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.”

† **We, too, can be overjoyed that the One who bears the scars and died for each of us is truly alive! And, because he lives, we can live new and abundant lives as well, no matter what the circumstances of life may bring.**

Many of you have your own stories to tell of doubt and faith, death and life, sorrow and joy. Share them with me and others. Tell of God's goodness and grace! Declare the Lord's praise day after day!

**Remember that the risen Christ Jesus comes to us behind the “closed doors” of our minds and our hearts. He offers us peace and assurance that he lives -- even if we don't see him with our eyes, or touch him with our hands. He gives strength and power by the Holy Spirit to those who believe, to live alive as his disciples! Receive that power and strength in him! Praise and thanks be to God in Christ Jesus our Lord! Amen.**

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John 20:19-31

*On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “**Peace be with you!**” 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21 Again Jesus said, “**Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.**” 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, “**Receive the Holy Spirit.** 23 If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”*

*Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”*

*26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “**Peace be with you!**” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “**Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.**” 28 Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; **blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**”*

*30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*