

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 Sermon: "From locked doors to living faith."

Scripture: John 20:19-31

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Opener: Christ the Lord is risen today 247

Choruses: O Praise The Name (Anástasis), Jesus is risen 254 vs 1-4

Choir & Bells: "Seek Ye First"

Closer: Open my eyes that I might see

Harmony in Hand

You've probably had this happen.

You're sitting in the exam room, and the doctor asks,
 "On a scale of 0–10, how bad is your pain?"

On the first Sunday after Easter,
 The high point of the Christian season,
 let me ask you something a little more personal:
 "On a scale of 0–10, how strong is your faith?"

The strength of our faith isn't static.
 It often ebbs and flows
 as we face new challenges or experiences.

Real faith needs reassurance.
 It struggles in seasons when God feels absent.
 And it calls for recommitment, again and again.

Just consider today's lesson.
 Today's passage from John takes us back
 To the evening of Easter Sunday.

The disciples have heard from
 Peter and John that Jesus' tomb is empty.
 Mary Magdalene has brought even more astonishing news:
 "I have seen the Lord" she declared.

And yet on the evening of Easter Sunday
 The disciples are gathered together behind locked doors.
 Despite these reports of Jesus' resurrection.
 They had witnessed all the terrible things that had happened to him.
 And they were afraid that the people who killed Jesus
 Might be coming for them next.

But then, right into this fear,
 Jesus comes and stands among them.
 He speaks the familiar greeting,
 "Shalom—peace be with you"
 But now it carries more weight.

Jesus appears to the disciples
 And he shows them his hands and side.
 The holes, the scars validate what they have already know
 Jesus has been crucified.

But his living presence among them validates
 What they Peter and John and Mary have told them:
 Jesus' was no longer in the tomb,
 He is risen from the grave.

Jesus appears among the disciples
 Who have been mourning in their hideout,
 And they respond with joy.

Then Jesus tells them they are being sent.
 and he 'breathes' the Holy Spirit upon them.

For those who know the story of Pentecost
 as recorded in the Book of Acts,
 This giving of the Spirit doesn't seem as remarkable or effective.

It may be that John is echoing the language of creation in Genesis
 (God breathing life into humanity)
 by showing Jesus breathing new life into his disciples.

Some Bible commentators see this as an enacted parable,
Similar to Jesus' washing of the disciples feet.

Just as the disciples would be effectively cleansed
by the sacrifice that would follow their foot washing,
These disciples will receive the power they need
To be witnesses after Jesus ascends.

On the evening of Easter Sunday
Jesus appears to the disciples in their hideout,
And gives them evidence of his resurrection.
Jesus then commissions them to carry on his ministry
And offers the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We're not told everything that happened in that room,
But this much is clear:
Jesus comes to reassure them and grow their faith.
How is that faith doing?
It must have been a nine or ten.

But not everyone is there for Jesus' appearance.
Not Thomas.
Thomas isn't with them that evening.
And despite all that they tell him,
he isn't ready to trust their testimony.
He wants to see things for himself:
"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." He declares.

A week later Jesus comes again.
It is instructive to note that the commissioned disciples
Are still behind locked doors.

While their faith soars in the presence of the resurrected Jesus,
It declines in his absence.
It's as if their faith has slipped back down—to a two or three.

But Jesus' shows up again,
And this time he talks directly to Thomas,
Jesus invites Thomas to touch his wounds and scars.
Jesus urges him: "Stop doubting and believe."

Jesus is able, it seems, to hear his disciples
When he is not physically present.
And while we may think this is a rebuke of 'doubting' Thomas,
The longer ending of the Gospel of Mark has Jesus' reprimanding
All the disciples for their ongoing lack of faith. [Mark 16:14]

All to say that the problem isn't just with Thomas
Who missed the earlier appearance.
The faith of all the disciples has been flagging
In the face of Jesus' absence.

But when Thomas is finally confronted with the resurrected Jesus
He doesn't need to examine Jesus' body.
Standing face-to-face with his master
He makes "one of the great Christological confessions in the New Testament"
[Carson 656]:
"My Lord and my God!"

This statement affirms Jesus' identity
That was declared at the beginning of John's Gospel:
"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word **was** God." [John 1:1]
In this second appearance Thomas is able to see
Who Jesus truly is,
And Thomas affirms his allegiance to his Lord.
It's not just belief but surrender.

Jesus makes a second appearance
Not just for Thomas but for all the disciples.
Faith struggles with absence.
A second appearance of Jesus will solidify their belief.

But this begs the question.
 If we are struggling with our own faith
 Does it mean that we need more experiences
 Or more vibrant experiences of the risen Lord?

Even as Jesus returns he rebukes Thomas's disbelief
 And the rest of the disciples' doubt by extension.
 At the same time Jesus offers a beatitude, a blessing
 For those who haven't received such support for their faith:

"Because you have seen me [Thomas],
 You have believed; blessed are those
 Who have not seen and yet have believed." [John 20:29]

Let me restate this, to make it a little clearer:
 "Blessed, then, are those who cannot share Thomas' experience of sight,
 but who, in part because they read of Thomas' experience,
 come to share Thomas' faith." [Carson 660]

What Jesus is saying is this:
 direct experience is powerful—but it isn't necessary.
 The testimony of others is sufficient.

No, we aren't called to believe blindly,
 But the life of faith demands that we all make a decision.
 Faith requires us to take a stand
 even when we don't have all the answers.
 At some point we need to simply trust what we have already received.
 And that brings us back to where we started:

Where is your faith today?
 Maybe you're at a nine.
 Maybe you're at a two.
 The good news is this: Jesus does not wait for perfect faith.
 He comes to people behind locked doors.
 He meets us in our fear, our questions, our hesitation.
 And he still says, "Peace be with you."

And notice this:
 Jesus doesn't just come to comfort them—
 he comes to send them.
 "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

The disciples would have preferred to stay behind those locked doors.
 It was safer there. Predictable. Controlled.
 But resurrection faith doesn't stay hidden.
 It moves outward. It steps into the world.
 It risks something.

So perhaps the real question isn't just,
 "Where is your faith on the scale?"
 But: "What is your next step?"

If your faith feels like a two,
 the next step might be to pray honestly again.
 If it feels like a five,
 the next step might be to speak about your faith
 with someone you trust.
 If it feels like a nine,
 the next step might be to follow Jesus
 somewhere that costs you something.

Because faith is not just something we have.
 It is something we live.
 In the words of Alister Begg
 "Faith is not believing in spite of evidence;
 rather, it is obeying in spite of the consequences"
 [Begg "Brave by faith" 53,54]

The same Jesus who once stood among the disciples
 now stands among us, not visible in the same way,
 but no less present.

Jesus still comes to us.
Jesus still gives his Spirit.
And Jesus still sends his people.

So don't wait for perfect certainty.
Don't wait for all your questions to be resolved.
Open the door.
Step out.
And follow him.

Wherever you are on the scale, open the door—
and take the next step with Jesus.

Thanks be to God. Amen.