

Behind Locked Doors

John 20:19-31; 1 Cor 15:42-49

April 8, 2018 – Second Sunday of Easter

The resurrection chapter in John's Gospel, Chapter 20, is among the richest writings in the entire Bible, and among my favorites. If you were here last Sunday, you heard me discuss the risen Lord's appearance to Mary. I spoke of it briefly at 10:30 and in a little more detail at 8:30; and both those sermons are on our website. But today, we read of the resurrected Jesus' appearance to the disciples.

John adds this interesting note. John makes a point of telling us that both times that Jesus appears, the disciple were meeting behind locked doors. What's that about? Is this some sort of a Star Trek "beam me up Scotty" that Jesus is able to materialize in their presence? Is the risen Christ able to pass through a solid wooden door? What are we to make of this statement that the doors were locked?

The Apostle Paul supports, or maybe confounds the mystery. Writing 40 years earlier than John's Gospel, in his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul states, "What is sown a physical body is raised a spiritual body." Now, this doesn't sound so strange in English, but the Greek words for "spiritual body" are *soma pneumatikon*. *Soma* is a body, quite literally a corpse; and *pneumatikon* is a Spirit, a ghost, a non-physical being. So what in the world is a "spiritual corpse?" What is Paul saying? "What is buried a physical corpse, is raised a spiritual corpse." Clearly, Paul is telling the Corinthian Church that the resurrection was not simply a matter of resuscitating the physical body. Clearly, the risen Christ is somehow changed, different, a spiritual presence. And I submit to you that Paul's vision of the risen Christ is not unlike the vision of the fourth evangelist who reports of a Christ that can appear in a room among his followers, even though the doors are locked.

Now, having said all of this, I must also say that we cannot simply dismiss the risen Christ as a spiritual presence. This is a person that could breathe on the disciples. This is a person that could invite Thomas to probe his wounds. This is a *soma*. This is a body. But this is also a spiritual *soma*, a body above and beyond any earthly body we can imagine.

Friends, have you ever so felt the presence of Christ that you felt he was right there, right beside you – to the point that you felt like you could almost reach out and touch him. I have. Oh it doesn't happen often. Yes, I often sense the Holy Spirit working in me and through me, and I praise God for that. But there have been those few exceptional times. . . at my marriage ceremony, my ordination, my graduation for seminary; and once at a much sadder time – as I was present at the death of a close friend. It was that experience that had a lot to do with me entering the ordained ministry. And so, I suspect the experience of the disciples in those

weeks following the first Easter was similar and, at the same time, hugely more real.

But, as I have said before, the Gospel of John was not written for the disciples. It was written for you and for me. Thus, we have Jesus final words to Thomas: “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” And the evangelist concludes: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through belief you may have life in his name.” Belief in the resurrected Christ. Belief in the spiritual body. Belief that, when Jesus said, “I will be with you always, even to the end of the age,” he meant it.

So let’s look back to Paul:

The first man, Adam, became a living being; the last Adam became a lift-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.” (1 Cor 15:45-59)

Each and every one of us bears the image of Adam. We are humans. We have two arms, two legs, ten fingers and toes. We walk upright. We think in certain ways. We are human. But, as I’ve preached many times before, each and every one of us also bears the image of God. I’ve stated before that the most important verse in the entire Bible, or at least in the Old Testament is Genesis 1:27: “So God created human kind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.” Indeed there is a spark of the divine in each of us. We are special. We were created in the image of God. But that image over time has been tarnished. Some would say, “It was tarnished at the fall – through the disobedience of Adam and Eve.” I’m not sure that I want to be that Augustinian; but there’s no denying that the divine image within us is sometimes tarnished.

But then comes Jesus. Then comes the passion, the death and the resurrection. Friends, Jesus died on a cross to restore that image. That’s what Paul is saying, “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.” We bear the image of the man of dust by virtue of our human birth; and we bear the image of the man of heaven by virtue of our Christian baptism.

So what does it look like to bear the image of Christ. Again, I turn to Paul. You know, I haven’t preached a lot on Paul, but somehow, when writing this sermon, the Spirit kept leading me to Paul. It’s in Galatians that we read, “The

works of the flesh [think the works of dust] are fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. . . But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”(Gal 5:19-20,22) That’s a pretty good list for bearing the image of the man from heaven.

So what do we glean from these writing on the resurrected Christ? Two things: First, we have a call to put on the image of Christ, to live a life in the Spirit, a life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; and second, we have a risen Savior, who is always by our side, to support us, to lead us in the path of peace, and most importantly to love us. May it be so, now and forever more.

Let us pray. . .

Most Holy Lord,
Lead us in the path of peace,
Lead us in the way you would have us walk,
and may we always know your loving presence
walking beside us every moment of every day of our lives.
Amen.

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