

"Locked Doors; Jesus Can Get In!"  
 Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church  
 March 30, 2008  
 Rev. Laura Smith-Conrad

Old Testament Scripture: Acts 2:14a, 22-32

### Prayer of Inspiration

Giver of Peace, you have come through our locked doors to breathe upon us the Good News. Guide us to live according to the new birth and living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

### John 20:19-31

*19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were 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 his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

*24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." 26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

### Proclamation

Locked doors. We all have them.

Dr. Anna Carter Florence, professor of Preaching at Columbia Seminary, suggests some such "locked door" scenarios. Perhaps you can relate.

You know there are problems in your place of work that need to be addressed, and you are afraid to speak out. You are afraid of the ramifications and consequences if

you do so. You speak to your boss, but he does not think there is a problem. But not speaking out is suffocating you. You feel caught and trapped, pacing inside the locked room of your mind. You cannot sleep. Your body is stretched by the stress. You search the Scriptures for wisdom and comfort. Your relationships suffer. You feel like this situation is choking the life out of you. You hunker down, lock your doors, pray for daylight and vow to suffer through. You hope this too shall pass...but you know it will not.

You are locked in, and no one can reach you.

This is your first year of High School and who knew it would be so bad? You're surrounded by too many people all the time and yet have never felt so alone. Girls who used to be your friends form an alliance against you. Guys that you have played with since kindergarten pretend you do not exist. Everyone seems to be going a different direction than you. Everyone is bigger, more mature and more popular than you are. Why doesn't anyone like you? Why is your body betraying you? You figure out that all you can do is act like nothing is bothering you. You put up walls so no one can hurt you and so that you don't have to feel anything.

You are locked in, and no one can reach you.

You are fifty two and your husband has just left you. He is in love with another woman and walked. You had no clue. Where did it all go wrong? Your friends are speechless. They are his friends, too. What now? Will you be okay financially? How will this affect the children and their relationships? Will anyone tell you that you are beautiful and desirable again? You do what has to be done. You maintain the house, go to work, and console the kids. Your friends cannot believe how well you are handling everything, but inside, you are scared to death.

You are locked in, and no one can reach you.<sup>1</sup>

This week you may have received the letter by email from our medical missionaries to Bangladesh, Drs. Les and Cindy Morgan. The letter was written on the Saturday before Easter Sunday. They have been living in the locked room that is called cancer. Their 21 year old son, Everett, is battling Ewings sarcoma. They are in Houston on leave from their post while he receives treatment. They write:

*Uncertainty is the hardest part of cancer treatment, especially when you are up against an aggressive and relentless tumor and when it affects your child. I feel like my family has been thrown overboard and swallowed by a great fish and like Jonah, is waiting now in silent darkness, aching to see even the softest light, to hear even the quietest word of hope. Like the stripped sanctuaries around our world today, in Dutch called "Silent Saturday," no words are left in our hearts but the primordial prayer that God will look upon us in our infirmity and have mercy.*

You are locked in, and no one can reach you.

When Jesus meets the disciples in John's gospel, they are locked in a room. The events of the last week have put the fear of God in them. They are confused, grieving, and afraid. That is a horrible place to be. Perhaps you have been in a locked room before where all you can do is stay stuck in fear.

We have to remember, in the Scripture story it is only Easter Sunday night. The resurrection has happened. Peter and the other disciple have seen the risen Lord. Mary Magdalene has also seen the risen Lord and she ran to tell only the disciples. They are the only ones who know this has happened. While we, here in 2008, know it is great news, the Disciples are *terrified*.

*Resurrection is terrifying.* Even the things we know, like dead people stay dead, are called into question. We have to wipe our eyes and pinch ourselves to see if this is really true and wonder, "Now, what?"

Jesus knows what his disciples are feeling. He appears to them and does not leave them alone in their locked room. He speaks peace to them. But he does not only offer words of peace, he offers his hands and shows them his side. He is the real Jesus, the same Jesus who had been nailed to the cross by the fear of those in power.

**Nailed to a cross** because he challenged the way things have always been.

**Nailed to a cross** because he came bringing a message that God is God and rulers in power are not.

**Nailed to the cross** by our inability to believe and understand the kingdom of God. This is our sin.

I hope that Jesus has visited you in your locked rooms, offered you himself and spoken words of peace.

Not only does Jesus offer words of peace, he breathes on the disciples, and on each of us, his very Spirit - his own life. Jesus is full-bodied. Here is scarred-hands Jesus, a Jesus whose very breath is life-giving to us. In some ways this is the first Pentecost - Jesus blessing us with his Spirit. And with breath, there is the gift of life.

It is interesting to me that he simply offers himself to the disciples and to Thomas. He does not quiz them on the Theological Tenets of the Reformed Tradition or ask them to repeat the Lord's Prayer and Apostle's Creed from memory. He gives them himself. He gives them what they need. He gives them the breath of life to sustain them.

Sometimes that is all we need when we are locked in our room- we need him with us to sustain us through

Until we can get up and unlock the door;  
 Until the right person knocks on the door;  
 Until we can do what we know has to be done.

His resurrection calls everything we know to be true into question!  
 Could there be possibilities that we have never thought of...

- For the worker feeling trapped in a difficult job - could he or she persevere and speak up so that he can affect change for the benefit of all?
- For the 9<sup>th</sup> grade student - could there be friends near him or her that he or she has not noticed in his locked-behind-doors, put-on-a-happy-face, wall-building reality?
- For the 52 year old single woman - could there be a new life waiting for her that she has not yet imagined?
- For the Morgan family whose son Everett has cancer - could healing happen even when there is no cure?

People of faith know that Jesus can meet us even in our locked rooms. Jesus can encourage us in our need to ask for help. The letter of the missionary family in Bangladesh, Les and Cindy Morgan, concludes with their asking for the church, you and I, who are the Body of Christ, the hands and feet of Christ in this world, for help. They write:

*That is why I decided to write to you today, to ask you to pray that prayer with us. As we wait together with you in silence for the Word of salvation, please pray for Everett and our family--that God will look upon us and be gracious unto us, lift us out of the depths of our uncertainty, and give us hope for new life. I can only believe that this is why Christ suffered, died, and was raised--so that we might be able to pray that prayer and wait patiently for the One who cares for us.*

Waiting patiently is a hard thing to do when you are locked in a room.

**BUT** when we are most afraid and locked in our rooms, especially when we are most vulnerable, the living Jesus steps in.

"Miss Bennie" was my mother's best friend since they were classmates at Winthrop in the 1950s. In the 1970's my family moved back to the town of York, where Bennie Love had always lived. To my mother and father she was always Bennie Glenn - it is hard for many of us to use another last name for folks we have known from our youth, before they were married. Miss Bennie was the kind of person who hugged you until you could not breathe. She laughed often and cried easily; usually the

laughing ending in crying. She taught 2<sup>nd</sup> grade at Bethel Elementary School for 30 years where her room overflowed with children, turtles, and critters. She loved animals, children and especially butterflies. You could say the butterfly was her mascot: she had butterfly jewelry, butterfly pictures, even butterfly wallpaper in her kitchen. She liked how they are transformed and became something new and beautiful. She pretty much had that attitude about people too. There is always the possibility and hope of something good.

For my mother and me she was a good friend. After my father's death, my mother, at age 47, was understandably overwhelmed and depressed. I was a moody middle-schooler, just at the age when mothers and daughters begin to butt heads. She had two boys, one in high school and one in college, a house to care for, and a job to maintain. Miss Bennie was a Godsend - a true friend. Every Saturday night Miss Bennie and my mother drank cups of hot tea and ate popped popcorn. They dyed each other's hair, made crafts, listened to music, and oh, how they would laugh and talk at the kitchen table. They did this for years.

Miss Bennie came into our locked room of sorrow and brought us peace, comfort and joy. I imagine them both sitting at the kitchen table together in the hallowed kitchen of heaven.

**When we are most afraid and locked in our rooms, especially when we are most vulnerable, the living Jesus steps in.**

Can you believe that? What will it take? How about these words of Jesus to us?

*Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

Or this:

*I will not leave you orphaned and alone, I am coming to you.*

Maybe this:

*Lo, I am with you even to the end of the age.*

We believe that Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed! And...

*Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. (Acts 2:33)*

May you see and hear the Good News even from behind your locked doors! You know Jesus can always find a way in.

<sup>1</sup>Thanks to Anna Carter Florence for this adaptation from Journal: Preaching the Lesson, March 30, 2008. [www.goodpreacher.com](http://www.goodpreacher.com)