

Title: Passing locked doors (part 2) – called to be a witness
 Luke 24:36-49

In last Sunday's sermon, I spoke about Jesus passing locked doors. The first was the locked door of the room where his disciples were meeting; locked because of their fear of the Jewish leadership who had crucified Jesus. But I also talked about passing the locked door of their hearts; hearts which had been closed because of doubt. To overcome their doubts Jesus let them see the physical evidence of His resurrection. See the wounds in my hands and feet. Touch the wound in my side. I am real. I am the Jesus you knew and lived with for three years. He asks for a piece of fish and eats it before them, to show that he has a human body. Why did he do all this? Why was it important for the disciples to see and to touch and the hear and sense the real presence of their Lord? He did this so that there would be no doubt that he had risen. He did this so that they might be witnesses, witnesses to the people, to Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, to the Mediterranean countries and ultimately... to the world. He did this so that they might be conduits of salvation to a world dying in sin.

What does it mean to be a witness? Well, to be a witness you have seen something happen, for example "I witnessed a car accident" or something like that. If you've watched the show "Law and Order" on TV, you know that to be a witness means you show up in court to testify about something, to share your story of "what you have seen" You tell the jury "what you have seen" to help them determine the truth of a matter. Jesus is calling his disciples to be witnesses so that others may realize the truth. So back to our Gospel lesson. The time of their meeting is not long after His resurrection. He has already been seen by many people, meaning, there are many witnesses to his resurrection. Many have heard that Jesus has risen from the dead. But none of these know the significance of His resurrection. It is that story... it is that witness for which the disciples are being called.

In our scripture lesson, from Luke 24 the disciples are meeting in a locked room and having a secret meeting. They, themselves, have heard the rumors about the risen Christ. Some have even seen the risen Christ, and they are wondering... "What does this mean?" "What does this mean?" Christ appears to his disciples, and it is here he gives instructions on what they are to do

⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has

promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

The disciples were called to be witnesses. More than that... WE are called to be witnesses. We are called to share our story of the fulfillment of the promises from long ago, promises of salvation. We are called to share that story to help others come to the truth, to help others come to salvation. What exactly is our story? Well, as Jesus said...

The Christ would suffer.

Rise from the dead on the third day,

and the forgiveness of sins would be offered to those who repent.

But you might say, that is nothing new. This story had already been heard, not just during the last three years of Jesus ministry, but from the prophets for centuries. True... many have heard... heard and misunderstood. There was a deeper understanding... a deeper question which needed to be answered. and it was the job of the disciples to bring people to the truth through hearing this deeper message. It was their job to give a witness which answered the question – “Who is Jesus Christ? “

This was the same question that Jesus posed to his disciples, “who do the people say that I am?” The disciples answer: “Oh, people think you are John the Baptist come alive again. “Some think you are the returning Elijah as foretold in Scripture.” “Some think you are a great prophet of God or a great teacher.” Jesus then cuts to the chase, “Who do YOU say I am?” It is here that the disciples show their ignorance. “Well, they said you’re not John the Baptist, because we know him.” “You’re a great teacher that’s for sure, and prophet too... and a Miracle worker, too?” Sadly, the primary truth about Jesus has eluded them. However, all of sudden, a man stands up. Simon mighty Simon, son of Jonah, stands and declares: “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.” In these words, Simon declares

“you are divine”

“you are God”

“you are the Messiah whom we have been waiting for.”

Jesus says

“blessed are you Peter for this truth has been revealed to you by my father in Heaven.”

Simon saw these things, not with his physical eyes, but with the eyes of faith. Simon Peter’s confession of “who Jesus was” revealed his relationship of faith

with God and with Jesus. It for this reason that Jesus gives Simon his new name “Peter.” In changing the name of Simon to Peter Jesus is making a pun, because the Greek word “Peter” (Petros) means “rock.”

And I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church, I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

This is such an important bit of scripture, and unfortunately one which also can be easily misunderstood. It sounds like Jesus is building the church upon Simon Peter, and giving Peter the keys of the kingdom. This is why you have images of the pearly gates with Peter as the doorman. However, Jesus uses two different words

And I tell you that you are Peter (Petros) and on this rock (Petrai) I will build my church,

Theologically, the keys of the kingdom, “the ability to forgive and retain sins,” was not given just to Peter, but to all the disciples. The reason we know this is because in the parallel story in John 20:23, Jesus breathes on all the disciples and gives them ALL the right to forgive or retain sins, i.e. the office of keys. and by extension, gives the keys to all Christians. So then, if not Peter (Petros) what is this Rock (Petrai) which Jesus is speaking about? What is the Rock (Petrai) upon which Jesus will build his kingdom?

The Rock which he is talking about is Peter’s witness of “who is Jesus.” It is upon the faith which brought him to realize “who Jesus is.” That was the Rock upon which the church stands (and still stands today). Jesus was telling them that their membership in the kingdom of Heaven was simply on the basis of the answer to the question “who am I?” that is, “Who is Jesus Christ?” That is our witness! That is the witness and the deeper message which the disciples were to share with the world. That is the witness WE are to share with the world. This question “Who is Jesus Christ?” must come before every person who hears the Gospel message. “Who do you say that Jesus is?”

Now You would think that the answer is clear. You would think that the answer is clear to anyone who can read a bible. Yet when you ask people today “who is Jesus?” you still get a variety of answers, none of which confesses that “He is the Son of God.” Some say: “Jesus was just a man, not God.” They say he was the illegitimate child of Mary, who just happened to turn out okay. Some say he is good teacher and wise man, come to teach us how to live Godly lives. Some

people say that “Jesus was the son of God” but they end up twisting everything else. They say that “all men are divine and can reach Godhood themselves.” They say: “Jesus was the brother of Satan.” “There is nothing unique about Jesus.” These people believe everything about Jesus except that... he was God, God incarnate, God in the flesh. As it turns out, if you do not believe that Jesus is the son of God, i.e. that Jesus is God, then he cannot be any of these other things: a man, a good teacher a wise man. He was not just a man. Angels sang at his birth. He could do miracles. God the father, himself, spoke with a voice from Heaven at his baptism, “This is my son in whom I am well pleased.” He was not just a good teacher or just a wise man. I mean sure he taught good ethics. Sure, he gave good counsel. But He also said: “He was the son of God.” He implied he was God! A good teacher and wise man, does not say these things. He would have to be a liar, and a very poor teacher and a very poor wise man to say these things, unless... unless in fact, He was the Son of God, unless he really was God, himself. AS it turns out, He is God. He is not the brother of Satan, one of the created angels. He is God. He was with God at creation. Either you believe the words of Scripture or you do not. You cannot add or change it.

So, what is our witness? What story do we share in the courts of world. What truth are we seeking to share? In faith, we confess that Jesus is the Son of the living God. Jesus is our Savior. Because Jesus died on the cross for us, we have a relationship with God. Not only that but because we all share the same father, we belong to each other. Our relationship with God our relationship with each other is built on an eternal foundation, a rock, a witness, which will last into eternity. All of this because we know the answer to the question “Who is Jesus Christ?”

Sadly, there are millions of people in this world who still do not know Jesus Christ. They do not know the answer to "Who is their savior?" Some don't even realize that there is a question. Because of this they live in despair. Because of this they will not enter Heaven. God has entrusted US with a treasure a wonderful message, ... that Jesus is our Savior, the son of the Living God. There are many people who will not enter Heaven because they cannot answer the simply test question "Is Jesus your savior?" This test is not graded on a curve. It's a “pass or fail.” Do not let someone you love “fail” because they never heard the answer. Our job is to give witness to the truth. Our job is to ask the question: “Who do you say Jesus is?” You know the answer. God has given us a wonderful witness to share. God has given each and every one of us voices of faith to proclaim the answer. Be a witness! Share the story.