

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro
24 April 2022

10:30 a.m. MT Worship
Second Sunday of Easter

Calvary Baptist Church
Denver, Colorado

“Although the Doors Were Shut...”

Second Sermon in the Easter Series: *A Moveable Feast*

John 20:19-31

New Revised Standard Version

I have a thing for doors, doorways, thresholds. I'm just drawn to them. And when I travel, I love to take pictures of doors. (Yep I'm that person in your tour group who is always patiently waiting for everyone else to pass by just so I can get the perfect picture with the right angle and lighting). I especially love really interesting doors with lots of texture, color, and personality; modern or antique, really tall and wide, or oddly tiny and tucked away; doors with intricate carvings and design, or perhaps doors surrounded by flowers or signs. Doors that are definitely used daily or doors that looked like they haven't been opened for years.

It's an odd fascination really. Because rarely do I *see* what is behind these doors that intrigue me so. Occasionally I'll make a photo of a door that I actually walk through, but the thing about doors that you walk through, or that you have permission to enter, is that they

are usually already swung open or propped open...perhaps even with someone standing in front of it to hold it open for you – so I usually don't notice the beauty or uniqueness of the doors that I am walking through, that I have the privilege to pass through. What I notice are the closed doors.

My experience with photography mirrors our real lives I think. We walk past way more closed doors in our lives than open ones, don't we? And, we fixate or gaze upon the closed doors more often.

Now, truth be told, most of the doors in the world are closed to us. They just are. We don't get to go wherever we want to go. We don't have a universal Master Key that unlocks all the secret basements and closets of the universe. Or all the ideal job opportunities or college admission offices or the best matches on those online dating apps. No, many of those doors

remain closed to us, no matter how loudly or long we knock.

And because there are so many places that we cannot go (that perhaps we want to go), we tend to see the closed doors so easily, so readily...while barely noticing the doors we walk through regularly. Like, say, the door to our home, welcoming us to shelter and warmth – what a privilege. The doors to our church, welcoming us to worship together after months and months of being apart during the pandemic – what a gift. Or even the automatic doors of an Emergency Room – parting ways quickly and efficiently to welcome us when we are hurt and in need, getting us to help as quickly as possible. Amazing, really, when you think about it.

So yes, there are many open doors in our lives, but most of the doors in the world are closed to us. And it seems this is increasingly the case as we live in our separate, independent homes and cars and workplaces. There's even a waiting room "door" on Zoom where you patiently hang out until you're "admitted" by the Powers That Be (whoever set up the zoom meeting).

All of this pondering about doors got me thinking about that greeting card quote that people use to soothe us when we get rejected from something we really wanted or when something in life didn't work out the way we had hoped or planned. You know the one: *"When one door closes, another door opens..."*

(Sigh) Yeah, yeah, yeah.

This quote is attributed to Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone (among other things). The quote makes sense in the context of inventions and discovery. With science, a "closed door" or "failure" is information and you can use that information to eventually get you closer and closer to the "open door" of the thing you are trying to invent or the problem you are trying to solve. Inventors and scientists *expect* to fail along the way as they work their way toward discovery and innovation.

But our lives are not science experiments are they?! So when a door closes that we really wanted to go through – it may not matter how many "other" doors are open; if the door *we wanted to walk through* is shut – it's shut. Maybe not forever, but

for now. And that's hard. We can get stuck. Staring at that closed door with regret, longing, resentment, anger, grief – you name it. We might even slump down and lean our backs up against that door, thinking that if we just stay there long enough it eventually has to open for us, right? Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe we just get a back ache and a sore bum.

When's the last time a door shut in your face?

Can you remember what it felt like to really want something – a job, an acceptance letter to a school, your name on that team roster or on the list of people who made the play or the musical. Perhaps the door wasn't something you applied for or tried out for – but a door that had always been propped open that suddenly closed. Like a relationship in your family that had once been easy and fluid, you and this person going in and out of each other's lives fairly effortlessly until something – politics, religion, family drama, or trauma – shut that door, and it's extremely heavy to open now...it takes a lot of effort, and it just seems easier to stay on different sides of that door and talk through the

walls, rather than trying to unlock it and walk through.

Maybe the door that closed wasn't a passageway to another stage in your life or wasn't a point of connection to someone in your life – maybe the door that shut is some part of your own mind or body. Perhaps you've gradually become a bit hardened and cynical and are less open minded to new thoughts or new people and you don't know why you get irritated or defensive so quickly. Or perhaps an injury or illness has left you unable to walk freely as you wish, leaving the doors you enter up to whoever is helping you get through them – whether it's the car door they open or the handicapped door button they push.

Or perhaps you've actually been locked out of a room you have every right to be in. Someone has shut you out – intentionally and harmfully. Think of refugees around the world, forced to leave their homes and forge ahead to foreign lands. The doors that are closed behind them, never to be opened again. Memories and whole lives – left in a hurry – living rooms of ordinary day-to-day life...now piles of bombed out rubble.

In all of these cases – whether literally or metaphorically – it seems that we often think of doors as the things that open and close spaces. They separate us from where we stand now and where we want to be or where we used to be. They are either behind us or before us – locked or unlocked.

But. I wonder if we are giving way more power to doors than they ought to have?

Because our gospel lesson today invites us to think of space and presence in a whole new way. It turns out the Divine doesn't need a door to enter or exit our lives; the Divine IS the doorway of our life. The Risen Christ doesn't need a key to unlock us from where we are hiding, the Risen Christ IS the key that unlocks our fear from forcing us to stay in one place. Jesus doesn't have to jump through hoops or bust down doors to break into our lives, Jesus just rolls away the stones that entomb us and walks right through the walls that we think are protecting us.

On Easter evening, after Mary has run to tell the disciples, "*I have seen the Lord,*" the disciples aren't celebrating or partying – they are freaked out

and afraid. Huddled in the upper room, doors locked to the outside world, afraid that they will be the next ones to be arrested and crucified. Almost as if he could sniff out their fear, Jesus just shows up – uninvited it seems. John makes a point of telling us that the doors were locked and the disciples were afraid – meaning, *they* were the ones that locked the door to protect themselves. They weren't locked in by someone else being held captive, they were trying to lock others out. But the Risen Christ won't be restrained or cut off. Jesus shows up and stands among them and says, casually (as one does, of course), "*Peace be with you.*"

Peace is the presence that penetrates past all barriers and defenses. And because Christ is Risen peace will *always* find the people! But this peace isn't always comforting; it can be challenging or even controversial. Jesus doesn't "pass the peace" by giving them a hug or handshake. Jesus "passes the peace" by *revealing his wounds*. Wow!

If the moment of resurrection recognition for Mary was the Risen Christ speaking her name; the moment of resurrection

recognition for *these* disciples was the Risen Christ showing them his wounds. Both are vulnerable, intimate acts that cannot be faked. Just as Mary instantly recognizes Jesus' voice, these disciples instantly recognize Jesus' wounds. It's the first moment in John's gospel when we learn that resurrection is not reversal. Resurrection doesn't just make our past go away. No, resurrection heals and renews and rebirths – but our scars remain, our wounds still give witness to our pain, even as their healing bears testimony to hope.

One of my favorite parts of this text is that the Risen Christ is definitely embodied – wounds and all – showing his physical body to his friends and later inviting Thomas to touch his wounds with his hands. And the Risen Christ is not only embodied (wounds and all), he also BREATHEs – exhaling peace, literally saying with his very breath, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” *And yet*, while the Risen Christ has a body and has breath, somehow, somehow, he is not confined by the ways our bodies and breath function in the world.

The Risen Christ does not need to use his hands to knock on a door or turn a key; he doesn't need to use his feet to walk through a doorway or kick down a locked door. The Risen Christ does not need to use his breath to yell and say, “Let me in!” No. The Risen Christ – with body and breath intact – merely *appears* in the room of the disciples' fear, standing solidly in their midst. As the Risen Christ makes an entrance, his body and breath do not exert effort to eradicate their fear, but rather express ease, inviting them to faith.

Once again, we realize that Jesus is just like us – with body and breath – and yet beyond us – in his ability to transcend time and space – and to bring a different energy and intention to his encounters. And his “ways of peace” seem to be way more effective than our “ways of power.”

And this “appearing” doesn't just happen once. It happens twice! Thomas isn't present when Jesus is there the first time. And even though Mary's singular testimony of “*I have seen the Lord*” now has a plurality of voices as it spreads, gaining strength as the disciples' tell their friend Thomas “*WE*

have seen the Lord!”, Thomas needs to see for himself.

And so another week passes and the disciples are *still* in that room locked away in fear, and, as John writes, “***Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said [once again], ‘Peace be with you...’***”

You know the story. Just the invitation for Thomas to touch Jesus’ wounds is enough for his belief to solidify into testimony: “*My Lord and My God!*” he says. At this point, Jesus speaks to the rest of us – to you and to me – as he enfolds all future generations into this gospel witness saying, “*Blessed are those who have **not** seen and yet have come to believe,*” (vs 29b).

We have not seen the Risen Christ, at least not in the same ways as Mary and Thomas and the others. But we have, perhaps, experienced and felt the breath and spirit of God – that peaceful presence that just overcomes us in moments when though chaos is swirling, somehow we find and feel that centering calm in our midst. And every time that happens – we can name it as the Risen Christ – saying, “*Peace be with you.*”

Notice he didn’t say “*do not fear*” – but rather “being afraid is okay, but in your fear,” Jesus says, “can you sense my presence?” And notice he says – “*See and touch my wounds,*” meaning, “I’ve been hurt and afraid too, just like you.” And notice he says, “*Receive the Holy Spirit,*” reminding us that what God has given me is a gift that is for you as well; the Spirit of the Divine is in you and around you (you cannot hide from it!) can you *perceive* it, and *receive* it?

You see, the Risen Christ invites us into this story very intentionally and purposefully – preparing us to be the ones to say, “*I have seen the Lord!*” Which is to say, the amazing feast that we have dined on throughout Jesus’ ministry that we learned about in the Season of Epiphany – all those things Jesus serves up to us through the stories of turning water to wine or talking with the Samaritan woman at the well...the dishes of Joy & Abundance, Justice & Equity, Light & Truth, Living Water & Grace, Healing & Hope, the Bread of Life, Spirit & Belief, Sight & Insight...these are dishes not just for our own enjoyment at the Table of the Lord – but they

are dishes for the delight and nourishment of the entire world.

In Lent, we learned how these dishes can be served on all kinds of tables because like or not, Jesus turns the tables of our lives upside down, inviting us to places we never thought we'd go, sitting at tables we often would just as well forego. In Lent Jesus invited us to sit at the Table with him – even when that Table was set in the midst of the bereaved and confused, and when that Table was set by betrayers, deniers, and crucifiers.

But now, in this Easter season, with Christ on the Loose in our lives and in the world, beginning with Mary running out from her encounter with the Risen Christ near the tomb proclaiming, *"I have seen the Lord!"* and continuing with the disciples saying from their place of huddled fear and worry, *"We have seen the Lord!"* – we now (you and me) are being challenged to see the Risen Christ as inviting us to share his presence as a moveable feast. The gifts and graces of our God can be experienced anywhere and we must take them into the places of our world where they are needed the most...even into locked rooms with shut

doors...even past high walls or shut off cities...especially into those places. The feast of God's love – the peace of Christ's presence – these are not delicacies that are only served in church; they are portable bites of peace in to-go containers ready to be taken and served and enjoyed anywhere and everywhere!

As we explore this theme of "The Moveable Feast" throughout Easter, today's text gives us such an important invitation because Jesus invites us to rethink how the world works.

"Although the doors were shut"...Jesus came and stood among them. The Risen Christ cannot be restricted or contained.

You see, we tend to think of doors as the things that open and close spaces, the things that grant entry or deny access, the things that separate us from where we are and where we want to go or where we have just run from. But much like the man-made borders of countries which have been drawn overtop of God's unified creation, much like these borders which separate us out into people groups and political powers but

say nothing of how God sees us or relates to us...because to God we are all humanity...we are all stewards of each other's lives – meant to share resources and to care for each other no matter the lines that divide. Well, doors are as elusive as borders. Just as we think borders separate us from one another, we can think that doors separate us as well. But today's text invites us to see beyond doors to the reality of the Divine who shows up without need of knocking or entry, without need of special code or key. The Spirit of the Living God is alive and at work in our lives and we cannot keep that Spirit out!

The Risen Christ does not need a doorknob to turn or a handle to click, or even a window to peer through. The Risen Christ only needs to know we are somewhere and in that somewhere he appears. The closet analogy I can think of for this is Deacon's Doggy Door. Deacon is our golden retriever. His doggy door lets him come and go in and out of our house and the yard as he pleases – all day long, he rushes through that little flap – in and out, in and out, in and out – usually lured outside by the presence of a squirrel or rabbit or passing dog on a walk – and usually lured

inside by the sound of the garage door (one of his people coming home) or the sound of cooking in the kitchen (perhaps there are crumbs to be snatched up!). Deacon goes wherever he *senses the presence of another* – the rush and whoosh of his body through the flap of the doggy door perhaps like the rush of the Holy Spirit (only slightly stinkier).

But don't you imagine the Spirit of the Risen Christ is like this in our lives? Going wherever "presence" is? Meeting us where we're at? "*Although the doors were shut,*" he rushed into the upper room, sensing the fear and need of his disciples. "*Although the doors were shut,*" he appeared again a week later, sensing the need of his friend Thomas.

"*Although the doors were shut,*" how has Christ showed up for you?

"*Although the doors were shut,*" keeping us from the school or job we wanted – Jesus shows up offering peace and presence giving us direction for another way.

"*Although the doors were shut,*" keeping us from gathering together in the pandemic – Jesus

showed up in our homes – offering peace and presence, giving us connection through computers, testimony through technology.

“Although the doors were shut,” ending the relationship that had defined our adult lives – Jesus shows up in our brokenness and fear – offering us peace and presence, the gift of the Spirit, renewed relationship through the witnessing of his wounds.

“Although the doors were shut” to recovery, when the treatment that was the “last hope” of effective healing proves ineffective – Jesus shows up, rising out of the tomb, offering us peace and presence, and the living reminder that Death does not define Life.

It turns out that no matter how beautifully they are carved or how brightly they are painted, doors are not crafted by Christ. Doors may serve as entries and exits in this world, but in the kin-dom of God, doors disappear. Which makes the moveable feast of the Good News all the easier to share!

We still live with doors in our lives, and many, if not most, will be closed. But – when it seems like all the doors are

shutting, Jesus still shows up. Whether we are the ones who shut the doors, or whether life slams them in our face, whether someone is blocking us from opening a door we desperately want open, or whether it’s just the door of our heart or mind that is closed – Jesus shows up.

And when Jesus shows up, he brings peace – the kind of centering peace that is as near to us as our breath. It is a peace that is not just a feeling of calm, but the peace that comes when we have the courage to show each other our wounds, and when we have the vulnerability to say, *“I need to see more.”*

The Risen Christ does not withhold his blessing for those who believe when they see him or touch him or hug him, *or* for those who believe without those things. He has already blessed those who he appeared to...he blessed them with his presence and words of peace. And then he goes a step further to offer all of us, who will not get to see the Risen Christ in person, a blessing as well.

And perhaps that blessing for us today is a reminder that there is no place, no room, no locked closed or compartment, where God is not. Wherever we are,

God is. Wherever we go, God will be. You really cannot make a wrong decision when it comes to the direction of your life – for wherever you decide to go – God will be. Sure there might be healthier and less healthy options, more life-giving and less-life-giving directions, but whatever room you find yourself in – whether someone else put you there or you locked yourself in there yourself – the Risen Christ sees you, finds you, appears to you – and says, *“Peace be with you.”*

Sometimes that Peace and Presence doesn’t feel like it’s enough. We often want something more out of God than God is meant to give. We want certainty. We want those doors to open and close with purpose and clarity. But that’s not life. Life is just being wherever you find yourself today, and realizing that *“Although the doors are shut,”* Christ is showing up. And the Risen Christ finds his way to us not by violently breaking down the doors, walls, and barriers we’ve put up around us, but by slowly and patiently breaking open our hearts with his presence, with his wounds, with his witness, with his forgiveness.

“Although the doors were shut,” Christ found a way in to their fear and the disciples proclaimed, *“We have seen the Lord!”*

May the Risen Christ find you this day – no matter how walled in or locked up or fearful or skeptical you are – and may the breath and spirit of peace center you and claim you until you too can say, *“I have seen the Lord!”*

For when we see the Lord, we can’t help but want to share the Feast of his presence and peace with the world.

Amen.