

INSIDE TO OUTSIDE

John 20:19-31

Intro

As I was reading through the scripture passages that were in the lectionary for today I was struck by the stark difference in the way that the disciples are portrayed.

So, with that being said, have you ever run into a situation that seems so unlikely that you need to have proof beyond a reasonable doubt before you will believe it?

And I mean the situation is so unlikely that you need to see it, feel it, experience it in order to believe it.

If you have, and I don't believe that I know anyone who hasn't had at least one of those experiences in their lives, then this morning's first passage is for you.

The story ends up revolving around the apostle Thomas and we are reminded why he has been labeled as 'Doubting Thomas.' As a reminder, these verses describe how Jesus appears to the disciples after his Easter resurrection.

All of the disciples that is, except for Thomas.

Thomas, when he eventually rejoins the disciples, hears about how the risen Christ was in their midst...and he can't believe it. The idea of Jesus actually being raised from the dead, let alone so that he can walk and talk is too impossible. Maybe the others were drunk and there was some mass hallucination. Maybe the others are trying to mess with his head by plating some sort of sick joke. There had to be some sort of logical explanation. He demands proof. That proof revolves around Jesus appearing again and Thomas physically touching the Crucifixion wounds on Jesus' hands and side.

Then it happens. Jesus appears and Thomas doubts no more. Hear the story of the one who could doubt no longer and be sure to take note of something that was mentioned at the conclusion of last Sunday's Easter worship: the shut (and even locked) doors. The scripture reads this way.

John 20:19-29

¹⁹When 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." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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."

²⁶A 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." ²⁷Then 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.

Acts 5:27-3

Intro

This morning's second passage takes place, most likely, about four or five months after the story that we just heard from the gospel according to John. In it, the disciples have emerged from behind their locked (or at the very least closed) doors and have begun to do as Jesus had called them to do. They have experienced the resurrected Christ, felt the moving of the Holy Spirit, and are stepping out into the world proclaiming what they know to be true. The disciples have just begun their public ministries and are beginning to get noticed by the authorities because of the healings that they are performing and the large crowds and numerous converts that they are procuring. This attention has even landed them in jail a few times. We pick up their story as they have just been brought in by the Jerusalem authorities to explain why they continue to speak out in spite of being imprisoned.

At times, this stepping from the inside to the outside caused them personal pain and discomfort but they were being led by a God. They could not simply remain inside the walls that kept them safe. They needed to move to the outside and allow the world to hear the truth that is found in the person of Jesus. The scripture reads this way.

Acts 5:27-32

²⁷ When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

"Inside to Outside"

This past week has been Austin's spring break week, and since spring break did not happen to be Holy Week (thank you very much Readington School Board!), we were actually able to take some time to have, what we refer to, as 'adventure days'. Thursday's adventure had us heading into New York City where we wrapped the night with one of Austin's favorite things to do: attend a Broadway musical, which turned out to be Disney's production of 'Frozen'.

Now here in 2019, going to see a Disney production on Broadway is rather commonplace (they currently have three shows running). And not only is it common, but as an attendee, you walk into the theater feeling rather confident that what you are going to see is going to be really entertaining. You might

know the story and even some of the songs, but how it is presented still leaves you feeling...maybe even surprised, but certainly entertained.

But 25 years ago, that was so not the case. 25 years ago, Disney decided to do something it had never done by not only creating a production ('Beauty and the Beast' was the first) but also partner with a theater (they financed the rehabilitation of the Palace Theater which, prior to the investment literally had mushrooms growing through the floor) and ultimately the city itself to reimagine what going to Broadway could mean, or at the very least what going to Broadway could mean again.

We look at Disney as something as close to a sure thing as possible in regard to their theater productions, but the reason that we are able to see them that way is because they were willing to not only take a chance, but then work hard at creating shows that people want to see...and sure they have the money to create these opportunities, but if the shows weren't entertaining, they wouldn't stay open. But they are, thus creating more and more opportunities for other stories to be told. Disney on Broadway has become a proven commodity...and it did that by taking a chance.

All of us have faced those times when we have had to take a chance; when we have had to step out and simply trust in something that we believe very strongly about, not knowing what will ultimately happen.

That stepping out is what faced the disciples in the stories that we heard this morning.

However, as the Gospel of John shows, they were not busting down the doors to get out there into the world to proclaim anything, let alone that Jesus was the Messiah. Verse 19 states very clearly that "the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked".

Why were they locked?

Most likely it was because they were afraid of who or what was beyond that door. John says as much...and we feel it too.

They were not just trying to stay out of the limelight. They were trying to stay out of every light. They wanted no part of any recognition because they knew that whatever acknowledgment that they drew would, on the whole, be negative.

Then an amazing transformation begins to take place.

Jesus appears in their midst and they begin to realize that what they thought to be impossible, that Jesus might have been raised as he taught them that he would be, that Jesus was the savior of the world, is actually true. We can only guess at the myriad of emotions that they were facing at that moment, but one of the feelings that had to be there was excitement.

Their friend, their teacher, their savior was alive! They remember the promises...and they begin to embrace them even as they are embraced by them.

However, even with that wonderful news they are still not running out into the streets to proclaim this news. Not yet.

The reason we know this is because of how the second half of the story begins on verse 26. This portion of the story still has the disciples behind a door. The door is no longer locked, but they're still inside. They haven't yet begun to spread that which they now know to be true.

This state of being inside is in stark contrast to the passage that we heard from Acts.

In Acts we hear Peter proclaiming to the Jerusalem authorities as he had done with the crowds around the temple, that they, "must obey God rather than any human authority."

That's one impressive change. They go from hiding behind a locked door, to meeting behind an unlocked door, to being out in the streets proclaiming that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Maybe you're thinking to yourselves, 'Yeah, but was it really all of them? Or was it just the ones we know about?' Said another way, 'was it just Peter, James, and John (in a sailboat) who had this big transformation?'

To this I say no. It was all of the disciples, even the one who doubted, Thomas, who experienced this impressive turnaround. In traditional stories, which are not scriptural, but have become a part of Christendom's oral history, it is said that Thomas traveled to India, to the area on the western coast that is called Kerela, and spoke what he knew to be true until the day he was killed.

It's a nice story. But the reality is, whether it was Thomas or not we cannot be sure, but that someone who believed in Jesus as the savior went in the first century to that part of the world because there has been a Christian presence there for 2000 years.

In some manner or form, all of the disciples ventured out from the safety that was inside and emerged into the unknown that was the outside world and spoke until they were silenced. They took what they learned to be true from inside the walls and took it to the outside so that all might be able to begin to hear and begin to understand.

They went from the inside to the outside.

The question that I have for you now is how are you taking what you know to be true inside of you, whether you've learned it inside of these walls or not, and taking that outside into the world of which you are a part? God does not want us as individuals or as a community of faith to remain behind doors, but instead head out and proclaim what we know to be true. We need to move outside and not only live but also say what we believe. Those opportunities will avail themselves so that you can step from the inside to the outside and say what you know to be true.

We talked about it last week: I love it when the church is full, but full church pews are not what the Gospel is for. The Gospel is to show, teach, and encourage people to know that the sacrifice that was made was for them and that faith in this truth necessarily leads us to live the message out beyond the doors of any sanctuary.

So get ready, ask for the power of the Holy Spirit to envelope you, because God is going to give you a chance, whether you think your ready for it or not, to proclaim what you know to be true.

After Sermon Prayer

God, You do want us to move from the inside to the outside. Help us to know that You will be with us as You place those opportunities to live out what we believe as well as say what we believe. Help us to feel that same assurance that the disciples were able to experience when they moved outside and began to do what You had called them to do. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.