

**John 20:19-31 [NIV]**

*On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"<sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

*<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."<sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

*<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.<sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"*

*But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."*

*<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"*

*<sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."*

*<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*

*<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

*<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.<sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

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We're in the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of John today, if you'd care to turn back there with me in a Bible. John 20.

Throughout Lent, in preparation for Resurrection Day this year, we worked through Jesus' "Passion Places": the different physical places where He found Himself and the consequences for us in His being there — all of it according to John's account in his gospel.

I wasn't originally intending to keep going in John, but this week, it struck me that too often, I think, we celebrate Jesus' resurrection at Easter by we reading the empty tomb account on Resurrection Day, and then we move right on to something else — some other topic, some other theme, something usually totally different.

I guess I should say that at least *I've* tended to do that in my preaching through the years, and what happens is — we wind up skipping over those very important, post-resurrection events.

So I've felt compelled to stick around John for a couple more weeks — to continue this series — and take a look at those post-resurrection passion places, like the one here, just read for us, about Jesus in the locked room.

Now, just like most Scripture passages, there are dozens, if not hundreds, of sermons that could be preached from this text.

For example — and, let me say that if you know me, you know that I'm not one of those preachers given to alliteration (you know, where you begin all your points

with the same letter of the alphabet) — if ever there was temptation to be alliterative, this passage provides it with regard to the sorts of things that Jesus gives to His disciples in that locked room.

I look at this passage and see that Jesus gives *peace*. Several times He speaks "peace" to His disciples who were so afraid of the Jewish leaders that for days they'd kept themselves locked away and out of sight. So, from this passage, we could talk quite a lot about Jesus in the locked room as the giver of *peace*.

We could also talk from this passage about Jesus as the giver of *purpose*. Those guys were hidden away wondering what to do next, and so Jesus, there in verse 21, tells them, "As God the Father sent me, so I'm sending you." He gives them a job, a mission, a *purpose*.

Keep in mind that all this happened on the evening of Resurrection Day, so we're pretty sure this is the first incidence of Jesus issuing this commission. He does say this, or something similar to it again, several times in the days to come, and it's all about *purpose* — about Jesus' followers following Him by carrying out His purpose.

So, we could talk about Jesus as the giver of *purpose*.

Jesus also, here in the locked room, gives *power* to his disciples.

Now there are questions about the extent of what's really happening here in verse 22, where we're told that Jesus breathed on them — within six feet of them and without a mask. Ah, the good old days!

Jesus breathed on them, and then He said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Now, there are some questions about this, because we know the Spirit doesn't come in power until nearly two months after this. That's when we see the big change in the disciples' behavior and courage.

So, what is this moment — this event? Is this a precursor to Pentecost? Is this a symbol? Is this an example? Is this a light breeze instead of the violent, rushing wind?

We're not sure, but whatever it was, we know that it was needed. These guys were hiding behind locked doors — peaceless, purposeless and powerless, hardly the sort of group that was ready to evangelize the world.

So, whatever Jesus does here, precisely, it has to do with *power* — possessing the power to pull off Jesus' purpose.

And in the context of this passage, we could talk a lot more about Jesus as the giver of *power*.

We also see here that Jesus gives His disciples *parameters*. The whole thing He says there in verse 23 about forgiving sins and not forgiving sins is a very interesting sentence, isn't it? That alone is worth several sermons. Quite a lot could be said about how the terms of forgiveness, though they are not ours to *prescribe*

according to our own opinion or evaluation, *are*, in fact, ours to *proclaim*.

Disciples of Jesus have a much larger role than we probably know in the preservation of the spiritual vitality of the Church, and these are the *parameters* of that role. Jesus give them to us here, so we could talk about those.

And then of course, Jesus, in the locked room there, also gives His disciples *proof*. He shows His hands – He shows them His side – at this point, apparently unsolicited and unprovoked, so they’d know that He was for real and not a ghost or a phantom, you see?

And He does the same for Thomas – He answers Thomas’ questions – later on.

Jesus gives *proof*.

So, there in that locked room, you have Jesus giving to His followers: *peace, purpose, power, parameters, and proof*. And, practically speaking, you could probably peruse this passage and perhaps provide a plethora of other possibilities.

But even though all these are perfectly plausible points for proclamation, I’ll not presently pursue any of those points, per se.

Instead, I want us to think about just one thing that Jesus does here in this passion place and what it means for our lives today; that is, how Jesus entered the room even though the doors were locked.

If you want to attach a “p” word to it, I guess you could say “penetrate;” Jesus *penetrated* the place where His people paused, petrified.

And that is the end of the “p...” stuff, OK? Promise.

When I moved to Wilmore in 1993, as far as I knew and could tell, almost nobody locked their homes here.

I did repair and remodeling work while going to Asbury seminary, and when I’d make appointments with people to do work in their house, they’d say to me, “Well, we may not be home when you arrive, but just go on in.”

And so, I’d ask them where their hidden key was, you know, because where I came from, everybody locked their houses and everyone hid a key somewhere, usually under a potted plant on the porch.

But when I’d ask that here, people would say, “Oh, there’s no hidden key – we never lock our door.”

“We never lock our door!”

That is an expression of felt safety – right? To be comfortable – to be at peace *living* with and *leaving* with and even *sleeping* – with *unlocked* doors.

There are probably some of you who still live that way. Those of you who do: would you raise your hands – let us know who you are? No, I’m just kidding. We are publicly livestreaming and posting this service, so I won’t ask you to do that.

I got in enough trouble when I announced that the Evans were on vacation a few months ago.

Through the years, things have changed here in Wilmore to some degree, and even though Wilmore is still a very safe place, thanks to both Jesus and our police department, most people these days probably don’t feel quite *that* safe here – not as safe as in days past.

It’s unfortunate, but we all know, in one way or another, the feelings of earthly insecurity.

As did Jesus’ disciples on this day. They presumed that the Jewish leaders who crucified Jesus would want to do the same to them. So, they sat in the darkness with doors locked and windows shuttered – frozen with fear.

But then – suddenly – they looked up and found Jesus standing there among them!

Doors still locked. Windows still closed. But there stood Jesus.

Another Resurrection Day miracle!

Apparently, just as Jesus had passed through the grave clothes that He wore, leaving them lying in the tomb in perfect order (which John goes to great lengths to describe,) so does He here pass through this room’s locked doors.

Now, how’s that possible, physically?

We don’t really know.

Maybe that was miraculously unique to Jesus in this moment.

Maybe it’s characteristic of the kind of post-resurrection heavenly bodies all followers of Jesus will receive.

We honestly don’t know how it happened, and that’s OK.

But once inside, what does He do?

What do you suppose the disciples expected Him to do, once they saw Him?

I’d think their expectation would have been for Him to – if not rebuke them – at least reprimand them to some degree. I mean, just three days before this, even after all of their declarations of allegiance and loyalty, they had all left Him. They’d all deserted Him.

Only Peter and John made any effort at all to try to stay near Him to do something to help, and they had failed Him even at that.

We know the disciples did not want to see the Jewish leaders at that moment.

But you know, at the same time, I’m not so sure the disciples – knowing what they themselves had done to Jesus – were really prepared to see *Him* either, which may well be why Jesus’ *first* words to them – *and* His *second* words to them – were: “*Peace to you.*”

“*Peace to you.*”

Notice that, even though He could have, Jesus did *not* lead off there with, “Hey, where have you guys been? I thought you were going to stick with me? Why’d you leave? Why didn’t you believe me? Why didn’t you listen to me? I tried to tell you all this stuff – how could you have missed what I was trying to say?”

He didn’t start out with any of that, did He?

His first words there were, “*Peace – to you.*”

The same King who rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on a donkey – the mount of kings at *peace*, that same King now appears here to His frightened friends, with the same message: “Peace to you.”

“Peace to you.”

Hey, aren’t those the words we *all* want to hear from Jesus? That He comes to us in peace? Sure, they are.

But some are convinced they won’t.

There are some people who don't want to see Jesus, because they're afraid of what they think He'll say to them if they were to meet.

There's a huge chunk of, if not our *world*, then at least our *culture*—our American society here—who go to great, great lengths to build rooms with high walls and heavy doors around their lives, all in hopes of keeping Jesus out.

Even some of us who name His name—who claim Him as our Savior: how often do we fill our lives with distractions and noise? We stay busy, busy, busy—preoccupied with everything and anything—in order to keep Jesus quiet, to muffle His voice, to keep Him out of the rooms where we live.

So many go to so much effort to try to keep Him *out*.

And yet, with one simple, effortless stroke, Jesus enters *in*.

And that's really what I want us to take away from this passage today, if nothing else: the fact that *there is no room that Jesus can be kept out of*. There is no wall—there is no door that we can erect—that Jesus cannot pass through into our lives.

Now, He's a remarkable gentleman, Jesus is. Though He makes Himself always available, ultimately, He does not force Himself on anyone, which is why it is eternally dangerous for us to *keep on* building walls and locking doors to ourselves and to our lives: because Jesus will not act in force against our resistance. He will not barge His way into those places where we have intentionally and forcefully created barriers.

It grieves Him to do it, but Jesus will, in the end, allow resistant people to have their way.

But, in the life of the ready person,  
in the life of the seeking person,  
of the open person,  
in the life of even the neutral person,  
the person who wonders,  
the person who considers,  
the person who questions,  
the person who's even the least bit willing to see and hear,

Jesus will walk right through the walls and doors of our lives and present Himself to us.

He'll do it over and over again. He does it anytime He likes, but if you've ever noticed, He has a way of doing that under certain conditions and at certain times in particular. In times of worship, for example. You're sitting there, not engaged, thinking about what's for dinner, and suddenly, bam, there He is. Just like Emeril.

He appears in times of fellowship where people are really connecting on deep levels.

He tends to appear in times of quiet, and in times and places of great beauty.

And yet He also appears in times of hardship,  
in times of sickness,  
in times of confusion.

And He especially tends to appear in times of grief, as we suffer the death of one we love.

As a church, we've experienced that twice this week: two funerals of faithful Christian men. And Jesus has

taken those opportunities to present Himself—He's just walked right through the walls and doors of lives.

It's remarkable how, in the presence of death, Jesus shrinks that distance between earth and Heaven. And suddenly,

even if we're not thinking about Him,

even if we're not expecting Him,

even if we're trying to avoid the whole topic of faith and eternity and the things of the Spirit,

even when we think the walls we've built and the doors we've locked will surely keep Him out:

suddenly there He is—right there in front of us.

And if we'll humble ourselves long enough to simply look and listen, what we'll realize is that He's not there to condemn. He has not come to reprimand or rebuke.

On the contrary, He's there to offer peace.

On *His* terms, of course. Not on *ours*. He is the King, after all.

But just the same, He's there to offer us peace.

"*Peace to you,*" He says.

To those living in grief, in confusion, in fear, "*Peace to you.*"

And if we'll simply receive Him, He'll give us that peace—His peace. And then if we'll go on with Him, He'll present us with more. He'll offer us *purpose* and *power* and *parameters*, and all the *proof* we would ever need.

So, don't imagine there's a wall or a door in your life that Jesus *can't* pass through—or that He *won't* pass through in order to reach you—to communicate with you, to offer His peace to you, and to take away your fear.

He is able to pass through the walls that we've built.

But you know, He's also able to pass through the walls and doors that *others* have tried to build in our lives: lies that we've been told about Him or about what He wants; mischaracterizations of who He is or maybe who we are.

There's a lot of untruth out there that's been said about Jesus. A lot of people have tried to blame things on God that He's not responsible for.

And, there are people who've tried to lay things on us that just aren't so.

If you've been told you're just too bad—too damaged—too lost—too far gone, don't believe it. Jesus slips right through that stuff—with an offer of peace, of salvation.

We all know how John said, "*It's because God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" We all know that.

But John wrote the next verse so that we'd be sure to understand, "*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*"

To save a world locked up in sin.

To save people locked up in fear.

To save you and me from whatever it is that we've locked inside.

Whether we've put ourselves there or someone else has, Jesus is ready today to bring peace to that place.

He's already there, in fact. You don't even have to let Him in. He's already inside—offering peace to you.

Would you embrace Him—and all the good He wants to do in you and give to you?

I hope you will. He hopes you will.

Closing Song - *He is Able*

Benediction:

In II Samuel 5, we read how King David, on only his second military venture as King, asked the Lord, "Should I go and fight against the Philistines?" And the Lord answered, "Go, and I'll give you victory."

So, David did as the Lord said, and the Philistines were defeated, and David praised God saying, "Like a bursting flood, the LORD has burst out against my enemies before me." And so, he called that place *Baal-perazim* - which means, the Lord of the breach or the breakthrough.

Every place is *Baal-perazim* to Jesus. Don't fight against it. Expect Him. Welcome Him. Listen to Him. And follow Him to peace.

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