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John 20:19-31
Acts 2:14a, 22-32
Psalm 16
1 Peter 1:3-9

April 19, 2020
The Second Sunday of Easter

When I was a little girl, I loved to play in the dirt. More specifically, I loved to play in the dirt at my grandmother's house. I would spend hours outdoors, watching bugs, catching butterflies, chasing grasshoppers, listening to birds. I knew every nook and cranny of her yard...and I knew the best places to find interesting things.

One particular spot was always a gold mine of critters. It was a small rock wall that ran along her dirt driveway. It wasn't a fancy wall and it wasn't tall. It was more like a little ledge of large stones that had been placed one on top of the other in a makeshift kind of way and over the years they had worked into the ground and lodged in place. Purple phlox grew randomly out of the crevices. So unassuming, you might walk by and not even notice that the rocks were anything special.

But, to me...they were pure joy.

I would spend hours at this humble rock wall. Exploring. Noticing. Investigating. Because underneath each rock were these incredible tiny villages made up of carefully crafted tunnels and pathways. They were vibrant and full of life. There was the rock where the large black ants lived. The rock where the large red ants lived. The rock where the little black ants lived. And, then there was my favorite...the rock where the rollie pollies lived. I don't know if you call them that (I think some people call them pill bugs) but when you picked them up their jointed black exo-skeleton would roll up into a perfect little ball and they would roll right out of your hand if you weren't careful. And there they all were...behind their respective rocks just begging for someone to take a peek.

For me, looking underneath those rocks at seeing those little villages held an incredible magic...a discovery so special, each stone a beautiful gift, a story of life.

I have always been fascinated about the stories that linger behind things. Behind rocks, or doors, or walls. Your story and mine.

And so it really caught my attention this week when Jesus keeps showing up on the other side of closed doorways, appearing behind walls and encountering the disciples who are behind those walls.

"...the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked out of fear, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." And... "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..."

It's kind of odd really. It's almost like a magician's tale – appearing and disappearing at will to the astonishment of the weary and uncertain disciples.

I love that Jesus suddenly peeks in on them, unannounced. I am sure they were busy going about their routine...trying to make sense of all that had been going on. Probably feeling isolated and insecure. And, suddenly, there he is...Jesus is there looking at them. Listening to them. Comforting and guiding them. Telling them to be at peace!

There is a beautiful curiosity at play in this text. An innocent sense of wonder and astonishment, a blessed patience and attentive questioning.

And, I love that we get to see the interplay of Thomas and Jesus together. Jesus peeking behind the walls at Thomas; Thomas wanting to take a peek at Jesus...wanting to know each other's story.

The moment is so deeply honest. Like Thomas, we all want to touch and feel and see Jesus. And we want Jesus to see us. It's a mutual longing, a desire to know and to be known.

As we look closer at our text, we find some incredible insights into the importance of what I would like to call a faithful curiosity and the importance of looking beyond our walls.

We are told in the first verse of our Gospel reading that the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked. Another way this text may be translated is that the doors were shut. In Greek, this idea of locked or shut doors translates as a shutting off of compassion, to be devoid of pity towards another person. It also may be translated as obstructing the entrance into the kingdom of heaven. In other words, you might say that the closed doors of the disciples were not simply a physical closure but a spiritual closure. A perceived absence from God and from the one whom they had come to love and to follow. The disciples' world was dark and covered up by their grief and loss. It's no surprise that they felt cut off from God.

That made me ask...How often are we closed off because we don't feel seen or known? When we lose hope in others, in ourselves, in God? We let the rocks and the doors and the walls that cover us keep out the love we need to give and the love we need to receive. Thus, we cut ourselves off from compassion and even from accepting the kingdom of heaven. Our doors are shut. And we dare anyone to look inside.

And then our text takes a critical turn...when the disciples finally see Jesus, that moment when Jesus peeks in and appears, the seeing that is presented isn't just a physical sight. It's a deeper sense of uncovering the real and honest truth. A seeing of the mind, a knowing, being acquainted with something deeply personal and powerful. They in essence were able to see the kingdom of Heaven and allow it in. God's love was no longer closed off to their perception but was fully present as they looked upon Jesus.

And, then, Jesus breathes on them.

This is so important. We only see this word “breathe” in this context used one other time in the entire Bible. It’s when we are told that God breathed on Adam and he became a living soul. And now, here, in John, Jesus breathes on his disciples, in essence giving them new life and new hope. It transforms them.

Think of the power of that moment. A movement from darkness, as the rock is lifted, the door was opened, the walls traversed and Jesus appears. And we can only imagine what that moment was like as they spent time in one another’s presence. Knowing one another. Seeing and being seen. Loving one another.

One of my favorite movies is “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty” and throughout the movie we see a quote from James Thurber (and from Life Magazine) referenced over and over again...

“To see the world, things dangerous to come to, to see behind walls, draw closer, to find each other, and to feel. That is the purpose of life.”

To see behind walls, or under rocks, or through doors...to draw closer, to find each other and to feel. To me, that is what this faithful curiosity is all about. It’s about our stories behind our walls. It’s about who we are in the dark and who Jesus comes to breathe new life in and through. It’s the realization that we are seen and known and loved and Jesus shines new light into our hearts so that we can live.

Behind walls, drawing closer, to find each other and to feel.

If you have been closed off, if you have felt unseen by the church, by family, by friends...if you have lost hope in others, in yourself, or in God...maybe you can allow Jesus to peek in just a little and get to know you. Allow the breath of God to start to breathe new life upon you. Maybe the door opens just a little today. That’s OK. But, as you are ready...let God in and allow God to know your story.

Amen.