

Children's Moment *Opening Doors*

Good morning, boys and girls,

Thank you for gathering to listen. I see pictures of you during the week and it reminds me how much I miss you.

I'm talking to you from my home today. Jesus always comes to be where we are, so Jesus is with you at home. Each week we're getting to see and hear from people about how Jesus comes to their home.

I have a question for you today,

“Have you ever locked your door by accident?”

Maybe it was your bedroom door or the bathroom door or a closet door or even the car door. When we're first learning how to open and close doors, it's easy to lock them. When that happens, we're locked inside while our parents are outside. I remember when that happened to me.

How did you feel? It was scary. You don't know what to do. All you know is that you want out, but can't get out.

A lot of people feel that way right now. Some people feel like they're locked at home. What can we do?

Jesus helps us when we're afraid. If you're locked inside a room or the car, the first thing to do is to pray. Ask Jesus to help with all your heart. You know what happens next? Jesus will help. You'll feel better. You can take a breath and calm down. You aren't going to stay in the room. Someone will help you get out. You can remember that and share it with other kids next time you see them.

Jesus gives us peace and shows us signs that he's with us.

What kind of signs do we see? There are lots of signs. One way is when two people who've been arguing decide to stop, forgive each other and make up. Another way is when someone who was sick gets better. Another way is when we see people who are calm even when everyone else is anxious. We have to look, but there are signs of Jesus around us, all the time. I invite you to look next time you're afraid. Jesus is there. Let's look for him and we'll find peace.

Let's pray ...

Message: “Behind Closed Doors”

How are you doing? Esperanza and I miss seeing you. We’d love to hear from you and will be trying to reach out more over the next weeks and months. It’s not easy being at home, particularly on Sunday.

We miss being together, our social interaction and the feeling of oneness we have when we worship as a group. But we know staying home is a good thing – the right thing, to do. It’s not about legal requirements. We’re being responsible, mature and compassionate by practicing Safe @ Home.

We’re honoring the sacrifices made by those in essential services, particularly our healthcare professional, but also including those who work in grocery stores, restaurants, the post office, delivery service and more. Thank you for your dedication and service.

We lift those who are struggling and at risk up in prayer. This crisis is highlighting illnesses in modern society. From hate crimes directed toward innocent brothers and sisters, to those who have no choice but to work and are at risk, to those who won’t receive assistance because of their status. I invite you to join me in praying for God to give us the strength and courage to change, learning new ways and finding a new normal.

Rev. John Farley, the South District Superintendent and Dean of the Cabinet, shared an interesting perspective this week. Rather than social distancing, which is a good thing, or social isolation, which is a bad thing, let’s consider a new approach: **social fasting**.

We can choose to embrace our involuntary separation as a time to seek out new ways God’s Spirit is at work, knocking on closed doors, and asking spiritual questions. The first, and foremost, is, **“How is it with your soul?”**

I believe we’re being prepared and led to a celebration we can’t imagine. After all, we are Easter people, energized and given hope when the stone door was rolled away, revealing an empty tomb. Jesus Christ is risen! He rises in our hearts and minds, reviving us from our slumber.

I admit it. I did something I don't normally do this week. I changed our scriptural theme. The reason is obvious: the Holy Spirit pointed us to John's gospel, the story of the disciples who were hiding behind closed doors. This passage connects strongly to our life now: we're all behind closed doors!

What kinds of doors are closed? The doors to our homes, churches, businesses, civic buildings and tourist locations are closed. The movie theaters, parks, beaches, trails, stadiums and concert halls, places where people gather, are closed. Our hospitals, nursing homes and care facilities are effectively closed; open only for those suffering most dire of conditions. COVID-19 entered our lives, forcing us to look for shelter and closing doors behind us.

Doors are closed for other reasons, too. All of them are unfair; most unjust. Some doors are closed by inequality based on income, benefits and status. Only those who can afford to stay at home have freedom to choose to do so without putting their lives at risk. Some doors are closed by inequality based on race. Greater numbers of our African American brothers and sisters are affected and dying. Asian Americans are experiencing hate in public and private places. Other doors are closed due to age, many seniors are living in forced isolation, restricted to their rooms. Doors closed due to gender should be open; sadly, the incidence of domestic violence has risen sharply over the past month.

Behind all these closed doors, we find the same thing. We're afraid. We're feeling the same way Jesus' disciples felt after Jesus died. Their sabbath has passed. It's Sunday evening and they're hiding behind closed doors, afraid. They're afraid of being arrested, tried and crucified. The Romans weren't known for their humanitarian practices.

The disciples were afraid for other reasons. All of them gave up jobs and walked away from their families to follow Jesus. If they're outcast, they'll lose their status, reputation and means to live. They don't fit in with the views of the church, so it will be difficult to be accepted as part of the community.

I believe they were struggling with trust issues and doubt as well. They heard the message from Mary and were told about the empty tomb

by Peter and John, yet their rabbi was betrayed and denied by two of his closest friends. They don't know if they can trust Peter.

Can they trust each other? Sounds familiar. We find it hard to know who to trust these days. This isn't because our experts and others have changed or become lesser in any way. It's our perspective that has changed. We're less sure. We become more aware of those who are trying to exploit or take advantage. We're less willing to trust.

That's what happens when we're afraid. We feel helpless, like everything's out of control. We feel like we don't matter. Our problems are insurmountable. We feel overwhelmed. Even good news can't shake us out of our lethargy. We feel like we're at a crossroad.

Jesus knows we're afraid. That's why Jesus doesn't wait for an invitation. He just appears, right in the middle of things. Jesus didn't knock on the door and wait for the disciples to answer. He did the unexpected for them, just as he does for us.

Jesus does four things. He appears unexpectedly, behind closed doors, demonstrating nothing can keep Jesus out. Jesus gives a gift: peace. Peace is the absence of fear in the presence of God. Then Jesus offers proof, showing them who he is through signs only he can offer them. The most obvious signs are the holes in his hands and the hole in his side, where he was pierced by a spear. The last thing he does is remind them he's sending them into the world to share.

How would you feel if Jesus appeared in your living room, said "Peace be with you" and then showed you proof he's alive and standing in front of you? We'd be jumping for joy!! That's exactly how the disciples felt. It must have been some celebration. I'm sure the neighbors complained.

Jesus appears in our lives today as well. He's present every time we gather to worship, sing praises to God, pray, give, serve and care for others, and share the news he's alive with others. Nothing can keep Jesus out, no matter where we are. There's no door closed so tightly he can't enter, no matter what kind of door it is. Inequality? Jesus loves and cares for everyone. He prefers to spend time with the sinners and the poor; those who need him the most. They are also the ones most

likely to accept him. Race? We're all the same, there's no favoritism. Jesus loves people of all ages. And he first appeared to the women outside the tomb, clearly showing us they were the truest of his disciples.

Are you afraid? Embrace Jesus and accept his love. Believe in him and trust God. God's love drives out fear, even the fear of death. Jesus' presence fills us with peace, shalom. It's rich, vibrant and healthy. When our heart is filled with peace, we find a new way of living. We build relationships that give life. We're less focused on goals, performance and earthly measures of success. We're focused on our spiritual life. We find joy in little things, even during the trials of life. We want others to join us, for them to know the peace of Christ.

I know what some of you are thinking, "yeah, pastor, that sounds good now, but how will it help me if _____ (*I get sick, I lose my job, my marriage falls apart, I fall to my addiction, my children won't listen, I feel like a failure, I'm afraid of dying alone*)." You believe and you're willing to follow, but you just don't know what will happen.

If you think that way, you're in good company. That's how Thomas felt. He was absent the first night when Jesus appeared. Thomas didn't share the others' experience. Thomas wanted to believe, but he was a very practical person. Thomas wanted to see for himself.

Doubt is real and natural. Everyone doubts some time. I've doubted my path in life and whether I should be a pastor. What I don't doubt is the reality of Jesus in my life. No matter what happens now or in the future, Jesus is walking with me and you through life. We can't escape his presence and love. I don't want to. What I find is this: Jesus is always present. I'm the one who wanders away, becomes anxious and afraid. Each time, I find myself back in the room, behind doors I've closed. The answer is simple. Turn back to Jesus with an open heart and mind.

Jesus won't disappoint. He'll return, when we least expect it, for the same purpose: to help us transform our fear to peace, our doubt to faith and our loneliness to hope. You'll know when he appears. Invite him

in. Your fears will melt away. You'll feel at peace. You'll see signs in your life and the lives of others showing you God is at work.

Don't be afraid. Trust God. Open your heart to Jesus.

Your life will be made better when you do.

May the peace of Christ fill your heart and mind. Amen.

Psalm 16 (The Message)

Keep me safe, O God,

I've run for dear life to you.

I say to God, "Be my Lord!"

Without you, nothing makes sense.

And these God-chosen lives all around -
what splendid friends they make!

Don't just go shopping for a god.

Gods are not for sale.

I swear I'll never treat god-names
like brand-names.

My choice is you, God, first and only.

And now I find I'm *your* choice!

You set me up with a house and yard.

And then you made me your heir!

The wise counsel God gives when I'm awake
is confirmed by my sleeping heart.

Day and night I'll stick with God;

I've got a good thing going and I'm not letting go.

I'm happy from the inside out,

and from the outside in, I'm firmly formed.

You canceled my ticket to hell -
that's not my destination!

Now you've got my feet on the life path,
all radiant from the shining of your face.

Ever since you took my hand,
I'm on the right way.

John 20:19-31 (CEB)

It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you don’t forgive them, they aren’t forgiven.”

Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn’t with the disciples when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, “We’ve seen the Lord!”

But he replied, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won’t believe.”

After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!”

Thomas responded to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus replied, “Do you believe because you see me? Happy are those who don’t see and yet believe.”

Then Jesus did many other miraculous signs in his disciples’ presence, signs that aren’t recorded in this scroll. But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God’s Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name.