

Rev. Janet R. Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
2nd Sunday of Easter
Sunday, April 12, 2026
Scripture: John 20:19-31
Sermon: Knock, Knock. Who's There?

When you were younger did you ever tell "Knock Knock" jokes? Or listen to your children or grandchildren tell "knock, knock" jokes? Okay here are some for you to help me with:

Knock, Knock. **Who's there?** Cash. **Cash who?** No thanks, I like Almonds more. Knock, Knock. **Who's There?** Annie. **Annie who?** Annie way you can let me in? Knock, Knock. **Who's there?** Zany. **Zany who?** Zany body home? Knock, Knock. **Who's there?** Yukon. **Yukon who?** Yukon say that again!

Remember the scripture passage: "When 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 ... " We find the disciples huddled behind locked doors. They didn't want anyone knocking on their doors. John says that the doors were locked for fear of others coming to get them as well. The disciples are afraid of the Jewish leaders who were behind the plot to kill Jesus. They are likely afraid for their own lives, afraid of their uncertain futures.

Maybe the disciples were also afraid of Jesus. After all, they had failed him miserably. Peter had denied him three times, and the rest had deserted him, except for "the disciple whom Jesus loved," who had been at the cross and had taken Jesus' mother into his home. Maybe the last person the disciples wanted to meet on that evening was Jesus, risen from the dead to confront them with their failures.

Jesus, however, will not be stopped by locked doors. Jesus didn't even knock to warn them he was coming into the room. Jesus, who is the "door" of the sheep (John 10:7) comes right through those locked doors and appears in the midst of his frightened sheep. He comes not to

confront his disciples with their failures, but to grant them peace. His greeting, “Peace be with you,” carries the sense of the Hebrew greeting “shalom,” a blessing that implies more than tranquility, but a deep and holistic sense of well-being — the kind of peace the world cannot give (John 14:27).

Then Jesus shows his disciples his hands and his side, so that they can see that it is he, the real, flesh-and-blood, crucified Jesus. It wasn't a ghost and they weren't imagining him. The disciples respond by rejoicing in seeing the Lord, just as Jesus had told them that they would (John 16:22). Again Jesus speaks a blessing of peace and tells them, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

The disciples are sent to continue Jesus' mission of revealing God to the world. They will not be left on their own in this overwhelming task. Jesus had promised to send another Advocate, *paraklétos*, one who is “called alongside” someone, who would be with them forever (14:16-17). Now he fulfills that promise. In an act of new creation (cf. Genesis 2:7), he breathes into his disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit (20:22). This Advocate or the Holy Spirit will teach them, and empower them. (14:26; 16:12-14).

Then Jesus tells his disciples, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (20:23). “Sin” in John's Gospel is an unbelief and the refusal to receive the revelation of God in the person of Jesus.

For some reason we are not told why Thomas was absent and missed out on this first Sunday evening encounter with the risen Jesus. Although he has gotten a bad rap as “doubting Thomas,” he asks for nothing more than the others have already received: to see Jesus, wounds and all. The wonder of this story is that Jesus shows up again one week later to provide exactly what Thomas needs and Thomas responds with the highest confession of anyone in the Gospel. Thomas makes a statement of trust and relationship: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

Jesus' response to Thomas (20:29) is not a rebuke, but rather a blessing for all those who will come to believe without having had the benefit of a bodily encounter with Jesus. John is talking to all of us who

have not seen but have heard this testimony: “But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (20:30-31).

The Easter season of alleluias can sometimes seem to leave little room for our doubts, our fears, and our pain. We tend to forget that for the first disciples, there was fear, doubt, pain, and confusion before there was understanding and joy at what had taken place on that day. One week after Jesus appeared to his disciples, they were gathered once again behind locked doors, suggesting that Thomas was not the only one still needing reassurance that Jesus had in fact conquered death.

Are we so different today, even after we’ve heard, just one week ago, that Jesus is risen from the grave? How do the anxiety and fear in our lives betray our own disbelief? Fears and anxieties keep us locked in, as individuals and as congregations and keep us from fulfilling the mission for which Jesus has called and sent us.

The natural thing to do when we are feeling anxious or threatened is to close ourselves off and lock the doors, like the disciples, to become focused on our own security rather than the risky mission to which we are called.

The promise of this scripture passage is that Jesus cannot be stopped by our locked doors. Jesus comes to us as he came to the first disciples, right in the midst of our fear, pain, doubt, and confusion. He comes speaking peace, breathing into our anxious lives the breath of the Holy Spirit.

The miracle is that Jesus keeps showing up. As he came back a week later for Thomas, Jesus keeps coming back week after week among his gathered disciples in the word, the water, the bread, and the cup.

Jesus doesn’t want us to miss out on the life and peace only he can give. He keeps sending us out of our safe, locked rooms, into a world that, like us, so desperately needs his gifts of life and peace and hope.

The crucifixion of Christ becomes the vehicle of life for Thomas, and for us. The thing which was the loss of all hope becomes the way of hope.

The words of a gospel hymn written by Bill Gaither capture well what hope in the resurrected Christ means:

Because he lives, I can face tomorrow;

Because he lives, all fear is gone

Because I know he holds the future

And life is worth the living just because he lives.

The Bible is God's love letter to you. It details every step along the path that God took to save you. From the first promise in the Garden of Eden to a manger in Bethlehem to a bloody cross at Golgotha to the empty garden tomb, this Word is your assurance of God's love. This Word is your assurance of God's care. This Word is your assurance that you have an almighty God who loves you and is protecting you from all danger. This Word assures us that every moment of doubt, every time we've not taken God at his Word or believed the promises he's made to us, that has all been forgiven.

John said at the end of our Gospel: these words are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. As you cling to these promises of God, you will find yourself being the very people that Jesus mentioned to Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." You are blessed, you are happy, and you are loved, because Jesus has given you eternal life. His tomb didn't stay occupied; neither will yours.

Hear the proof, see the proof, read the proof, rejoice in the proof, believe the proof, for it all comes from God. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! He is among us!

I wonder, one week after Easter, is our life different? Where are we living? In the freedom and joy of resurrection or behind locked doors. How is our life different after Easter?