

Kirk of St James  
Sunday April 8, 2018  
Sermon "Beyond the Doors"  
Rev. Amanda Henderson-Bolton

This past Halloween you may have noticed a video I uploaded on my Facebook page. Chad had bought one of the inflatable t-rex costumes and spent Halloween night out dancing on our front lawn. When little ones were coming up our walkway Chad would make sure he was out dancing and moving around so they would know he was there and not scare them. However, when older youth and teens were coming up our walkway he would freeze, and the costume would look like the other Halloween inflatables on our lawn and he would jump out at them as they reached the door. One poor teen almost jumped over the side of our front deck--she laughed afterwards. Halloween is a time when those small moments of fright are expected. People tend to watch scary movies, and visit "haunted" house tours and other various experiences because it is part of the season and we expect to be frightened--it makes it fun.

When we come to the season of Easter we do not expect to find fear but the passage in John today is full of it. Even though the disciples have heard about the resurrection of Jesus, even though some of them have seen him with their eyes, fear still dominates their lives. They don't understand what is happening and they don't know what to do, so they lock the doors and hide. It is a response that makes sense from a human point of view. When we find ourselves home alone or hear a noise that spooks us one of the first things we do is make sure the doors are locked! It is a way to try and control our fear and our environment because there is something about fear that leaves us feeling out of control.

While this response may be natural it also demonstrates how little the disciples have grasped the events of the resurrection. As one biblical commentator has pointed out "A chronic temptation for the church is to stay behind closed doors. In the experience of the Western church since the advent of the modern world, enlightenment pressures have conspired with this perennial temptation to place the church squarely behind the closed door of the private and personnel domain. Behind this door are found the personal, spiritual, and familial dilemmas that occupy humans in their private existence. The message of the gospel is taken seriously and with some urgency behind this door, with the prospect of healing and wholeness embraced enthusiastically for this area of life. On the other side of that door stand the public and social worlds that occupy humans when they venture forth from "home." Beyond that door are found the economic, political, and civic realities that occupy people most of their waking hours. Here the gospel's promise is scarcely acknowledged or, if glimpsed, is deemed out of place." How accurate is that description?

Let us take a moment to think about it. The disciples have the Good News. They have information that can change not only people's lives but also the world. But, they are so afraid to take it into a hostile world that they withdraw, and only let themselves live that reality behind closed doors. Away from any eyes or ears that may hear it or see it. They are living in tension: there is the Good News that must be shared vs. a world that at best isn't interested and at worst hostile towards it. We too likely live that same tension in our own lives. We have celebrated the joy of the resurrection--we are an Easter people! Yet the next week when we gather we are not quite sure what to do with the good news. I struggle with this daily, how should I live my faith out beyond the

doors of the church? How can I take what is happening behind the doors and live it out on the other side?

It is a complicated question isn't it? We live in a world that is not sure what to do with faith. People in general find it far easier to sit with the idea of spirituality which can be much vaguer. The charges that people often bring against Christianity, everything from hypocrisy to judgement to irrelevance are harder to hang on a term like spirituality, therefore it can be whatever it wants while avoiding negative overtones. I am sure that even people in Jesus' day were comfortable with the thought of spirituality, after all there was a multitude of gods for everything, and a wide variety of religions. How would the fledgling Christian faith ever become anything more than a side note in history?

Luckily Jesus understood both the struggle and the fear. In this account in John nothing will keep Jesus from his disciples. One scholar wrote "John tells us, that Jesus walks through a closed, locked door to get to Thomas. It is not that Thomas's doubt drives him to demand answers from Jesus. It is Jesus who is determined to reach this stalwart skeptic, whom no one else seems able to convince. It is Jesus who refuses to let deadbolts or chains block the movement of love toward the one who lacks faith. So too it is with us. When doubt crowds out hope, we can be confident that Jesus will come to meet us where we are, even it is out on the far edge of faith that has forgotten how to believe. What a strange thing to hold on to--this certainty that answers to our most profound and desperate questions about life come not because we seek them with focused determination but because God comes seeking us, stepping through the walls that hardship builds around us, offering love at the very moment that grace seems nothing but a farcical ghost story told by not-to-be-believed friends." Jesus never gives

up on his fearful and confused disciples, instead he returns to them again and again as he continues to show them how to live lives that reflect resurrection hope.

We too strive to figure out how to live resurrection hope in our own lives and communities. In these days after Easter we ask ourselves how can we carry the good news beyond our doors and out into the world? How can we bring the message in a way that resonates with the world and our context? I would encourage all of us to take some time to think about how we do this in the weeks to come. What can our faith lived outside the walls look like? I am always amazed by the creative ways churches find to do this. In one church community they realized there were a lot of young parents in their city, so they offered free potty training seminars families could attend for free. Some churches offer a monthly meal and bible study focusing on good coffee and good conversation. Some churches took church to the surrounding pubs offering a "theology on tap." What unique needs surround us in our community and how can we connect with those needs. I would encourage you to keep an eye open in the weeks to come and if you see a need or a place where we can reach out and connect with the community let us know.

If the life, death and resurrection of Jesus have taught us anything, it is that we should expect the unexpected. Just as the resurrected Jesus surprised his disciples while they were locked behind a set of doors, the risen Lord reminds us that ministry and faith are full of the unexpected. What unique ways can the Kirk of St James continue to carry their faith beyond our doors and into the community. What unique ministry opportunities await us? My prayer is that God will give us the eyes to see (even if it does not look like we expect!) the hearts to respond, and the hands to do the work. As always in matters of faith and hope the best is yet to come!