

“Resurrection, continued”

Easter 2B
John 20:19-31

The Rev. Emily Krause Corzine
Associate Minister

April 8, 2018

From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

Prayer for Illumination: In the quietness of these moments, O God, come to us and open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit. Open us to the power of the risen Christ in this place, in our lives and in the world. Amen.

If you were here last week, we celebrated Easter in joyous fashion. There was a lot to celebrate. There were shouts of Alleluia! There was brass and choir and don't forget the flowers and triumphant Easter hymns. It was glorious!

What were you doing last Sunday evening? The weather was nice, maybe you were out for an evening stroll, finishing yard work, or in the company of family and friends. Maybe you were traveling back from Easter dinner, or enjoying the women's basketball national championship game and saw the last second winning shot. It all was incredible.

To be quite honest, this week has felt like a letdown. Three inches of snow on Monday, torrential rains on Tuesday with devastating tornadoes. The routine goes back to normal. The hectic pace of life resumes. The kids go back to school. The week after Easter---there's the challenge.

The text this week moves us quickly from empty tombs and shouts of Alleluia to locked doors and fearful disciples. Gone is the fresh aroma of the lilies and in its place is the stale air of the disciples' waiting room.

According to the Gospel of John, the disciples spend that first Easter evening, huddling together in a locked room, after the public execution of Jesus. His closest friends and followers do the practical thing: they go into hiding. Someone finds a safe house in Jerusalem, a room big enough for all of them, a sturdy door with a strong bolt. They hide in that room.

It's the biggest and most important day in the history of the Christian faith—the day the world learns that God raised Jesus from the dead. This amazing event is known to Peter, the disciple whom Jesus loved, Mary and they have shared this news with others. And they all respond to this amazing, wonderful, unimaginable good news by spending the evening in a locked room-afraid.

Not very inspiring. Christ is risen---let's go inside and lock the door. I'd hope for a more uplifting story for this morning?

We could all use a more rousing story on the Sunday after Easter. You did return to hear how the rest of the Easter story goes, didn't you?

The disciples have good reasons to stay inside. They are known associates, accomplices of a convicted criminal. They are grieving the death of their dear friend and they fear for their own lives. They may fear Jesus and what would happen to them if they encounter him.

The room where the disciples are, is itself a tomb-like place. The air is stale not unlike a tomb where Jesus was for three days. They had togetherness that smells like...well, fear and uncertainty. What kind of world were they creating for themselves in that space?

Pastor Lee Beckes wrote this poem focusing on these words in John's Gospel. He writes:

So they locked the doors and why not?
Who would not fear the knock in the night,
The knuckled rapping of the secret police
Who could make a man disappear without a trace?

They witnessed the summary arrest in Gethsemane,
The midnight trail, the hasty sentence and execution.
They knew all about crosses and consequences
And they locked the doors.¹

¹ Lee Beckes, *Brushed by the Sacred*, 2015.

It's understandable, really, why they lock the door. What is harder to understand is how Jesus manages to get through it. According to the story not once but twice Jesus manages to get inside a room without entering through a door. He doesn't knock. He doesn't ring the doorbell. He isn't expected. He hasn't been invited. One minute he isn't there. The next minute he is.

In this passage, Jesus is sneaky. It's not a compliment. Synonyms for sneaky include deceitful, deceptive, dishonest, unethical, fraudulent, dubious. Should I continue? This savior has no respect for boundaries and limits. This holy intruder is adept at getting past security systems. He is good at picking locks. Skilled at breaking in. What do we usually call these people who do these kinds of things? Criminals. Thieves. Robbers. Burglars.

Is this who we want in a lord and savior? Don't we want someone who is more up front, above board, transparent (yea, that's a good word).

Let me read the next part of that poem by Lee Beckes:

But if you want to fear anyone, fear the One
For whom locked doors are no barrier,
Who enters without knocking

And offers a peace that accepts no quarter.²

Rev. Beckes makes a good point. Why did Jesus sneak up on the disciples? Why didn't he just knock on the door?

Because he wasn't sure if they would let him in.

Would you?

I'm not always good at letting Jesus in. I'll tell you what I am good at. Giving the impression that everything is fine. Are you good at that? Most of us got through our day giving off the impression that we are relatively competent at living--pulled together well enough to pass for normal. It's the vibe, "I've got this. I'm on it. I can handle it." Who needs a crucified savior? Who has time to share their problems with Jesus? And doing that means that we aren't fine, that we don't have everything under control and like the disciples we live in fear of something. Fear for the safety and well-being of our children, we fear growing old, we fear losing autonomy, we fear looking back and not seeing meaningful life and work.

So, yes if Jesus knocks on my door tonight, I will probably pretend I'm not home or say very politely, "I'm not interested right now--come back another time--run along."

² Ibid., 2015

Perhaps what is going on in that closed up, tomb-like room with fearful people is that God is finding it harder to raise people like the disciples than it was to raise Jesus from the dead.

Perhaps, God's only begun the heavy lifting. This story shows the resurrection of community, of a gathered people, fearful to the point of paralysis---stuck there in that room. Only Jesus is the one who can help put their fear behind them.

Just by showing up and breathing the Spirit into them and giving them the call to go and serve, Jesus gives them life not bound in fear but released for something new.

There is a reason Jesus is sneaky. Because a more direct approach often doesn't work so well. So, he doesn't wait for an invitation. He doesn't knock. Jesus comes when our guard is down--when we don't expect an experience of the divine--when no one is watching--when we think we are alone--when we aren't pulled together--when we least expect it.

Because Jesus knows how badly we need to be broken into, and how hard we will resist. Jesus is the one who sneaks up on the disciples in that room.

Instead, Jesus find the subtle ways to enter our lives, no matter how we try to run, avoid, block the door, pull the covers over

our heads. Jesus keeps finding us. Because Jesus is not willing to give up on us. This sneaky Jesus. This resourceful, persistent Jesus.

(11:00) In our baptism, we are claimed by Christ, in his dying and in his rising, so that we may have new life. A resurrection, continued. That's the promise we make to Jack this morning. That is the promise God makes to us all.

There may come a time when little Jack wants to walk away from God and wants nothing to do with the church of Jesus Christ. All I can say is good luck with that.

In baptism, we entrust those we love to this resourceful God. Jesus will show up in the lives of those we love. And in our lives.

We can be like the disciples, and many times we are. We can slam the door on Jesus. We can lock the door and bolt it shut. We can pile furniture in front of the door and think there is no way Jesus can get to us now.

It won't work. We turn around and there he is. In the face of one we love. In the prayers of the gathered community. In the words of a poet. In the wisdom of another. In love offered and received.

Jesus is sneaky.

We turn around and there he is. And that may not mean a lot on days when we really do have everything under control. When we actually are doing just fine. But on those days when we aren't fine, when we don't have much of anything under control, when our fears get the best of us, when we reach for something to grab hold of and find only air, well then it will mean everything that Jesus is there.

In the next fifty days during the season of Eastertide watch for Jesus to show up. Jesus can't be stopped by any locked doors on our homes or in our hearts. 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 and encouraging us in our journey.

Jesus is sneaky that way. Thanks be to God.

Christ is Risen. *Christ is Risen Indeed.*

*Amen.*³

Copyright 2018, First Congregational Church, UCC

³ Sermon the collaborative work of a sermon group in 2017 and 2018. The Lee Beckes poem shared with me by Rev. Amy Miracle, Broad Street Presbyterian Church. I am grateful for a sermon she called "Sneaky!"