

Rev. Janet Doyle  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter  
Sunday, April 11, 2021  
Scripture: John 20: 19-31

### **Sermon: Knock, Knock. Who's There?**

Children love Knock Knock Jokes when they are growing up. Have you ever met a child that doesn't know at least one or two Knock Knock Jokes? So I am going to need your help with two Knock Knock jokes. "Knock Knock. **Who's there?** Boo. **Boo who?** Aww, don't cry!" "Knock Knock. **Who's there?** You. **You who?** You who? Anybody home?"

Well Jesus apparently didn't know any Knock Knock Jokes because after his resurrection the evening of that day the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Do you notice I said, "The doors were locked?" Jesus didn't even knock. He didn't have to because he was in his resurrected form; not yet ascended to go back to God. There he was standing among the disciples and said, "Peace be with you!" I bet that was a complete surprise to all in that room.

We have all probably heard the phrase, "seeing is believing." In order to fully accept something to be true, someone needs to see it with his or her own eyes.

When the Second World War ended in 1945, four Japanese soldiers who had been left on the Filipino Island of Lubang refused to believe that the war was over. Even though the outside world tried to contact them by dropping leaflets, letters, and photographs on the island, they thought that the Allied Forces were just trying to trick them.

And so they spent year after year huddling together in the jungle, living on bananas and mangoes. They launched attacks on the villagers, killing at least 30 of them. They waited for their commanders to return to Lubang with reinforcements. After 27 years of waiting, only one of them was left. Lt. Hiroo Onoda, now 51 years old, was discovered by a young Japanese college dropout named Suzuki who tried to convince him that the war was over. But Onoda told him that he would believe it only if his own

commander ordered him to surrender. And so Suzuki went back to Japan, found Onoda's former commander and brought him to Lubang.

On March 9, 1974 Onoda's former commander read to him the official military order that all Japanese soldiers were to surrender as they had lost the war in August 1945. He was utterly shocked "We really lost the war! How could they have been so sloppy? If the war has really ended, then what had my comrades died for? And what have I been doing here for all these years?" Onoda sadly unloaded his rifle which he had faithfully kept and maintained for 30 years and returned to Japan where he received a hero's welcome and a huge pension. Hiroo Onoda went on to become a successful rancher and to establish nature schools to educate young Japanese children. But think of what he could have done in all that lost time if only he had believed that the Second World War had ended 30 years earlier.

In our scripture passage this morning, the disciples suffered because of their unbelief. Despite all the eyewitness reports from Mary Magdalene, the women, and the disciples on the road to Emmaus, they refused to believe that their master had risen from the dead as he said he would. They would have continued to live in doubt and fear if Jesus had not come to them personally to end their unbelief.

Our society and culture is one of skepticism. It is one where we tend to doubt before believing. When it comes to anything, we need to have proof. That is why many people say they don't believe in God.

It is almost 2000 years since Jesus' resurrection. We celebrate Easter each year. We get excited and rejoice in proclaiming the good news that Jesus, our Savior, is Risen indeed from the tomb on Easter morning. But many don't believe it. For many it is just another day. But in reality, this is crucial to our faith. If Christ did not rise from the grave, then there is no victory over sin and death.

As they sat in the upper room in fear and unbelief, the Lord suddenly appeared right in their midst and showed them his hands and feet and side. Only then did they believe that He had risen from the dead.

However, a disciple named Thomas was not present when this happened. He continued to live in fear and unbelief until Jesus appeared to

the disciples again when Thomas was there a week later. Jesus told Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Thomas' doubt turned into a confession of belief in the risen Christ. They all needed to stop doubting what the empty tomb meant and believe that it meant what he said would happen. But could they trust and believe that this was true?

Jesus knew that his disciples had locked themselves in a house and were fearful. He knew they were anxious and deeply troubled. He calmed the storms that raged in their hearts, just like he calmed the storm when they were in the boat on the sea. At that time on the sea Jesus said, "Peace, be still" (Mark 4:39) and now his words have the same calming effect on his disciples, "Peace be with you!" He repeats it in verse 21 and verse 26. This is not a typical Jewish greeting. In fact, this is the only instance in the New Testament where Jesus ever said, "Peace be with you!" And so, it draws our attention to the special peace the Lord brings to his anxious, bewildered disciples in need of direction.

Jesus wants us to have peace. In John 14:27 he was with his disciples before his death and said to them, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you: not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid." Now in Chapter 20 of John, Jesus' resurrected body bears witness to his completed work on the cross and shows us the peace we can have in believing in him.

This peace can be ours as well if you believe in Jesus who died on the cross and rose again. You have peace with God through him. You can have the peace of God, which passes all understanding, which will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7) This is a peace that doesn't depend on having peaceful circumstances, but it is a peace that comes from within. A peace that you can always have even when circumstances around you are not peaceful at all.

Two artists set out to paint a picture representing perfect peace. The first artist depicted a carefree little boy sitting in a boat on a calm lake without a ripple to disturb its surface. The other artist painted a raging waterfall with strong winds whipping the spray about. But on a branch of a tree overhanging the swirling waters a robin had built its nest. And it

was sitting peacefully on her eggs with its eyes closed, content and totally undisturbed by its stormy surroundings. This is a picture of the lasting peace that Jesus brings—a peace that every believer can have in the midst of storms.

Perhaps you need peace right now and you are in the midst of a storm. Perhaps you have a troubled or heavy heart today because of some difficult news or health situation you are facing. Or perhaps some recent events in our world or in your life have shaken your faith. Jesus wants to have our burdens and cares. Jesus gave the anxious disciples a peace they had never known, and Jesus can give you the same peace to your weary and troubled heart.

The Risen Lord also brought them a lasting joy that could only come to those who believed. Jesus said to the disciples, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

John tells us that those who believe will have life in his name. We will not be able to put our finger in his hands and his side, but we can read the firsthand accounts of those who were there to witness these things. We can see God at work in the lives of people who give their hearts to our Risen Savior.

As it says in Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” The fact is, that Jesus did die on the cross, and the fact is that the tomb was empty, and witnesses saw that he was alive after the third day.

The ones Jesus had in mind here are believers like you and me, believers from every age of history who have never seen Him and yet we believe in Him.

Last Sunday was Easter. We celebrated the resurrection of Jesus our Savior. Every Sunday is Resurrection Day, and we have hope in our living Savior. Do you have faith to move forward in your faith every day? Do you have hope in the future as you follow your Savior? Or do you doubt and don't believe because the world tells you God is Dead?

In verse 22 Jesus says to the disciples, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

Faith in the Risen Lord is the basis for the Church's Mission. Remember if Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would have no good news at all to proclaim. We would not be here today, but we are a people of hope and a joy beyond daily happiness. We know a risen Savior.

1 Corinthians 15:17 says, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." Verse 23 Jesus again is teaching about the forgiveness of sins. "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we can have forgiveness of sins and we can forgive others.

In verse 22, we see Jesus breathing on His disciples. He was giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower them for service. "And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

God wants us to trust in him and his peace and serve him wherever we can in this world, locally or around the world. We have opportunities, at the church, to grow in your faith; Bible Studies, Mission Projects, and Sunday Worship Services, and we hope more opportunities will be offered as Covid-19 restrictions are lessened.

Let us all be drawn closer to our Risen Savior and invite others to come and meet him. He is the one to turn to and he will give your life and a peace the world cannot give in the midst of joys and sorrows.

Max Lucado tells a story in his book, ***Begin Again***. (p.87-89). He was seated on an airplane and another passenger greeted him and told him he had heard him speak and appreciated his books. An hour later the same man came down the aisle and gave Max a message he scribbled on a napkin. The message read: Max, Six summers ago Lynne and I buried our twenty-four-year-old daughter. This came about following a lake accident and two weeks on life support. We didn't see this coming. How do you go on a summer vacation with four and come back home with three?

Friends, some of whom had buried precious children, rallied around our family. A country lawyer with his encouraging message that "God means you good, not harm" was one of those encouraging voices. Several of your books were given to Lynne and me.

We prayed for a miracle. I wanted her made new, her smile and brilliance restored. To unplug our daughter from life support was very,

very hard. Although the decision was painful, we were confident that we were doing the right thing in laying her in the arms of a mighty God. He knew our pain.

His best work may not have been restoring Erin to this life but his assistance for Lynne and me to let him have her. He made our daughter better than new. He restored my Erin to his eternal presence. That is his best work!

This was not a lightweight hope. This was an assurance: "Let me have your Erin. I've got her now."

God's children reflecting the very nature of God became his presence around us. Our faith is getting us through this.

Faith is a choice."

Max wrote, "I read the napkin testimony several times. I wanted to know, How does this happen? How does a dad bury a daughter and believe, so deeply believe, that God meant him good not harm, that God had received his daughter in his loving arms, that God did his best work in the hearts of sorrow? The napkin could have easily borne a different message. One of anger and bitterness. One of disappointment and despair. One full of hurt, even hate, toward God. What made this message different? Simple. The grieving dad believes God's promises. "Faith is a choice," he concluded. Max writes, "New-beginning people choose to trust God's promises. They choose to believe that God is up to something good even though all we see looks bad."

When your teacher and Savior is dying on the cross and all looks hopeless, remember the empty tomb tells us to choose faith over doubt.

When everyone and everything around you is in chaos, in despair, or in panic, choose the path of peace with God. Hold on to the promises of God. Choose faith in a Risen Savior.

Proverbs 3: 5-6 says,

***"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and he will direct your paths."***