

Sermon - "Walking Through Walls"

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These four walls.

After a year of the Covid-19 pandemic, and quarantine and isolation, and staying at home, I have gotten pretty familiar with these four walls. What used to be just a trip to the kitchen to get a drink of water has become a field trip for me seeing the other part of the house. If I'm feeling especially adventuresome, I might even go all the way to the living room, where there's a couch, and a TV set.

These four walls are part of who I am.

But after a year, after this year, I can feel these four walls starting to close in on me. When people go to prison, we call the four walls that they're in a cell. But this is also the word that ancient Christian monks and even monks and contemplative Christians today use for their room. Go to your cell, someone once said, and it will teach you everything.

There are some days that these four walls feel like a prison cell to me. And there are some days that they feel like the cell of a monastery, a place that is sacred. Even though it's not very fancy or big, a place where Jesus comes and meets me where I am.

And over the past year, I've been surprised almost every day about how that's happened. Here in these four walls.

Sometimes, I meet Jesus Christ when I look out the window and I see the giant cedar tree and my neighbor's yard, and two or three crows fighting it out for the top, top-most branch.

Sometimes, Jesus makes his way into these four walls through the screen of my computer. And the faces of all of the people that I'm doing good work important work with, even though they're really far away. And I really miss them.

Sometimes, Jesus breaks into these four walls in the form of a text message from someone I haven't heard from in a long time. It says I was thinking of you today and wondering how you were doing.

Jesus breaks into the four walls of my cell in all of these ways, and so many more. For although these walls are impenetrable boundaries, boundaries that keep me safe from getting sick. There is no wall or height, or depth that can separate me or any of us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the scripture you heard Mark read today, the disciples are gathered together in a locked room. It's shortly after the events of the crucifixion of that early first Easter morning, and no one is quite sure what's going to happen. All we know from the Scripture is that they're afraid. They're afraid in particular of the authorities. If that's what happened to Jesus, I think they might be considering, if that's what happened to Jesus, what might happen to us?

And so, the disciples too are gathered afraid in their four walls when all of a sudden in their midst they see Jesus. Scripture says he breathed His peace onto them. He breathed his peace - isn't that lovely? He shows them his wounds in his hands and feet and side. Ones from the cross, that are

now transformed into something that's filled with new life. Wounds that in some way that they still don't understand, have been healed.

Jesus breathed his peace, he shows them his wounds, and he gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit. And he tells them that they too, have the power to forgive the power to set one another, free. And if they use this power, that the world will change.

The disciples were all gathered together in their four walls, but their friend Thomas wasn't there. You know, Thomas, there's another adjective that usually comes before his name, Doubting Thomas. That's not what he's called in Scripture. But he's called that because he tells them unless I see his side and the marks and his hands, and his feet, I won't believe.

And so, Jesus does what Jesus always does. He comes back.

Jesus comes back through the walls, those four walls into the room, where the disciples are with Thomas, and he breathes his peace. And he shows his hands and his side. And Thomas proclaims, "My Lord, and my God."

Since Jesus meets us where we are, even when we're in quarantine, even when we're staying at home, even when we are afraid, like those early disciples, afraid to move, afraid to risk, afraid that what has just happened to other people might happen to us next. Our fear is no obstacle for Jesus Christ. Jesus walks through my four walls, he walked through walls for the disciples, even for Thomas. And he walks through walls for all of us, thanks be to God.

We are at a moment, a year into this pandemic, where some of the walls that were keeping us safe are starting to come tumbling down. There are vaccines, there is a sense that things are getting better. That we're moving into the next phase of who we are called to be and how we are called to live. And that people like me and my family, who have stayed inside these four walls for so many weeks, will finally get to reconnect with all of the wonder and beauty that we know is waiting for us still outside this place.

At this point in history, the walls are coming tumbling down. Thanks be to God.

But I would invite you, as disciples of Jesus to remember that Jesus not only breathed his peace on us, Jesus not only shows us that wounds can be healed. But Jesus gives us the power gives us the responsibility and the constant reminder that we are to set other people free as we ourselves have been set free.

And if the pandemic has taught us anything, it has taught us that even after the vaccine has made the virus an artifact of history, and that great and glorious day cannot come soon enough. Even then there are those among us who are still imprisoned by invisible walls.

There are neighbors that we know who are struggling with the walls of their addiction. There are people who have spent the past year living in homes that are violent and they're not sure they see a way out. There are

people who are told everyday by voices in this society, that because of their culture, because of their race, because of who they were made to be by God, that they are less than; that their lives do not matter and are not sacred.

And friends, it is lies like these that build up invisible walls around people in this world.

What walls have been holding you in? Where has Jesus set you free? And who is it in your life? For whom you would be willing to walk through walls and say there is a better way? And if you come with me, we can follow it together.

Who is that person who set you free with the love of Jesus? And who is that person whose walls might be closing in on them a little too closely right now?

Jesus walked through walls for the disciples, even for Thomas, who somehow missed it the first time Jesus comes back. And he walks through walls for all of us still today.

So, my prayer for you is this. May you feel Jesus breathing deep peace into your life. May you trust even after you've seen the horror of something like the cross. May you trust that with God, all wounds can be healed. And may you accept the freedom and power that God gives you to set others free. Knowing that as you do, there is a love that travels with you every step of the way. A love that is so powerful that it will help you walk through walls.

Amen.