

May 1, 2011

Shut That Door! REALLY?

Gracious God, May these words be your words of grace. Amen

In 1994 on Palm Sunday, Kelly Clems had begun to lead worship in Goshen, Alabama. When she heard the torrential rain and the hail begin to come down, she wondered if she should cancel the service. The choir began to sing. The sound of the storm was so loud, they could not be heard. Suddenly someone in the congregation yelled, "Get down now." With the sound of those words the roof of the church came crashing down upon them. They had been hit by a tornado. Kelly remembers trying to reach for the children in the palm parade – specifically her daughter when she was knocked out by a flying brick. The church was demolished. And many died that day. The next week was full of funerals, including Kelly's own daughter. But the question that kept being asked was "What are we going to do about Easter?" They needed Easter more than ever. They ached for the Good News. They decided to hold a sunrise service on the parking lot, beside the destroyed church. Some one erected a cross made of beams from the destroyed church. Kelly rose that day and had these words to say from the Epistles: "Nothing shall separate us from the love of God. Shall tribulation or persecution or famine, or nakedness or peril or sword? No, in all things we are more than conquerors through Christ Jesus. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor anything else in all of creation will separate us from God."

The resurrection tells us this! The resurrection told the disciples this. But in the Gospel of John we find the disciples not free, not joyful, but locked in a room afraid. Jesus had risen – Yes – but the empire and temple government believed it to be a rumor that needed to be squashed. And this left the disciples shaking in their boots.

We read that Jesus showed up – how he came through that locked door we do not know. He wasn't a ghost. He was real – with wounds and scars. He greets them with God's peace. He breathes the Holy Spirit upon them and sends them out. Then the story ends abruptly with a sentence that seems out of place – "If you forgive the sins of any they will be forgiven, if not, they won't". How troubling. God's love is deep and wide enough to forgive all of humanity. Why did Jesus say this to his disciples? That is a lot of power to give them. It gives them a lot of opportunity to judge others, to withhold forgiveness. Is this what God wants? The disciples were raw, scarred, scared. They could have held onto that anger and fear and remained stuck in that room.

"Nothing can separate us from the love of God," Paul tells us. Not even locked door - for Jesus penetrates our pain and our resistance.

Jesus aches for peace in our world – He wants all to be nourished, healthy, fed, and whole. Why hasn't it happened? God depends on us. If we can't forgive our brothers and sisters, we are all stuck behind closed doors. We shut ourselves off from others and from God. God needs us to be agents of God's amazing love that reaches through all boundaries.

Just as Jesus sent the disciples out of the locked room that day; Jesus wishes us peace, breathes the spirit of life upon us, and sends us out to do God's work. We celebrate a family meal today. Jesus shows up to remind us that we are sent out from this place to do God's work. Our closing hymn today says, "Jesus calls us in and sends us out, bearing fruit in a world of doubt, gives us love to tell, bread to share: Jesus lives again, earth can breath again, pass the word around; loaves abound."

Shut the door? Lock it? Keep safe? No one in, no one out? NO WAY! Jesus surprises us and shows up. Jesus tells us to open that door – WIDE. Step out, inhale the sweet breath of resurrection AND live out the peace.