

Let the Light in and Open the Door!
John 20:19-31

Low Sunday

I have been at Asbury for three years but last Sunday was my first normal Easter Sunday at Asbury. I was glad that so many of our church members and visitors gathered together at the sanctuary and celebrated the resurrection of our Christ. Normally, the pews are only filled for funerals, but I was happy to see the church full of people making a joyful noise for the resurrection of Christ. Of course, I am not so naïve as to believe that that many people would show up today. Maybe I will need to wait another year to see some of them. After the busy season of Lent and the excitement of Easter, everything is back to normal. Our expectation for the risen Christ, our religious devotions, worship attendance, everything is now back to normal. So, the Sunday after the high season of Easter is called “low Sunday.” I understand the need for rest and recuperation after a busy season, but we also need to remember that every Sunday is a “little Easter!” and I hope that we can make every Sunday truly Easter!

When you read a book...

As you know, I am still a student and hope to graduate this year. As an international student, reading a book for me takes much more time and effort than native English speakers. The deadlines for weekly reading assignments come every week and I don't always have enough time to read all the books and papers. Then, one of my friends gave me some important advice. Can you guess what it was? He told me that if you don't have enough time to read everything, you need to read the beginning and the end. The introduction is a kind of summary of the main arguments and the ending generally highlights what the author thinks the most significant points are. While the Gospel of John has 21 chapters, many biblical scholars argue that chapter 21 was added at a later period. So technically, today's reading is the last chapter of John's gospel and in the last sentence, the gospel writer wrote, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” (30-31)

What is the purpose of the Gospel of John? It's not for the disciples themselves. It is for us. “These are written so that YOU may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and that through BELIEVING you may have life in his name.” The gospel of John is written for us to believe in Jesus as the Messiah so that we may find life in his name. It is for us! Last Sunday, we had a baptism for Maverick and I asked three questions to the whole congregation during the profession of faith.

The first question was “Do you believe in God the Father?” and all in the congregation answered, “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.” The second question was “Do you believe in Jesus Christ?” and you answered, “I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.” The last one was “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?” and you replied, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” What word is used repeatedly in these questions and answers? It's “BELIEVE!” The main story of Thomas is all about his “believing!” Belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Christian faith.

Believe...!

While we often confess we believe in God, we believe in Jesus, we believe in Holy Spirit, we don't often think of the nature of belief or 'believing' itself. What is "believing?" The Greek word for believe is *pist*. While the English verb 'believe' has a predominantly cognitive emphasis, the definition of the Greek word *pist*, "range from trusting in something (or someone), relying on something (or someone), to believing something is true."¹ *Pist* is more than intellectual assent. Think of when your father or mother say, "I love you" and you believed it, your belief in them is more than a cognitive assent to their "I love you" statement. Your belief is more like trust in them. Trust encompasses your feelings that influence your thoughts and actions.

Even dogs can have trust in their owners and their trust influences their ways of sleeping. [ppt] This is my dog, Joy. He prefers to sleep like this picture, lying on his back with his belly up and legs in the air. This posture was so strange to me so I googled why a dog might sleep in this weird position. The meaning of this belly-up sleeping position is that the dog fully trusts the owner and the environment. Dog's trust in their owner, influences their sleeping position.

It's the same to people. My father and I often went to the mountains to collect wild herbs and so we didn't follow the hiking trails. We just walked into the woods in the middle of nowhere. I would never do that if I were alone. But I trusted my father so I walked with him. My trust in my father cast out my fear of walking into the deep mountain forest and made me follow my father. In the same sense, believing that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, means that we trust him as our Savior and this trust in the risen Christ influences how we see the world and how we think and act. Trust is a remedy for fear and it helps us open our closed doors.

Trust Opens Doors!

According to Scripture, the disciples gathered at a house. The disciples had already heard about Mary Magdalene's witness, "I have seen the Lord!" but they didn't believe it. They were afraid of the Jews searching for their next prey so they locked the door of the house. Fear controlled their thoughts and actions rather than trust. The good news is that Jesus came to them. Jesus came to the locked house and greeted them, "Peace be with you." Despite their disbelief, Jesus appeared himself and showed them the wounds of the nails in his hands and the hole in his side. Jesus, the light of the world broke into the locked house and showed the disciples a way of moving forward by giving them a new purpose. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Jesus didn't want his disciples to remain in a locked house, but wanted them to open their doors and go into the world. The only key to open the locked door was trust.

Dr. Rene Schreiner offers an interesting analogy of this situation with the current "trust economy." Have you ever stayed in an Airbnb? For those who do not know about Airbnb, Airbnb is an internet platform that connects people. When you travel, where do you stay? You would normally stay at a motel or an inn. But some people want to open their house to others while getting some financial income and Airbnb connects guests and hosts. Do you think it's a good idea to open your house to strangers for some financial profit? Do you think it's a good idea to go into a stranger's house to stay for a night? It sounds dangerous and risky. "In his 2016 TED talk, Airbnb founder, Joe Gebbia describes how "designing for trust" is the critical factor in getting people to open doors, whether to enter or to let people in."² Airbnb, Uber or Lyft... all

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-of-easter-3/commentary-on-john-2019-31-18>

² Ibid.

operate on a trust economy, based on “trust” and trust is the key to open doors. Of course, trust and risk go hand-in-hand. Dr. Rene said, “One does not need to risk anything in order to trust; however, one must take a risk in order to engage in trusting action.” Risk is the indispensable ingredient that transforms trust into trusting action.”³

It’s the same for us. Trust is essential for opening our church doors to everyone and welcoming them, as well as going out into the world to share the good news. While we don’t have to worry about persecution, we fear rejection from people when we share the gospel of the risen Christ. An old maxim says, “we should never discuss politics or religion at the dinner table” so we don’t talk about Jesus even at our Easter family dinner table. We are afraid that our confession may disrupt our family dinner.

Asbury is very good at helping others but think of how far can we go? Helping others is risky because it requires our time, energy and money. The amount of risk we are willing to take is dependent upon the amount of trust we have. I am not saying that we don’t do enough. What I would like to say is that we can still grow in faith and love by trusting God more.

Our Christ has risen and he put his trust in us. So let us trust him and open the door. Do not be afraid of rejection or challenges. Don’t be satisfied with what we have done but with faith, let us have a big dream for the church and draw the circle wide. And our risen Christ will walk with us and guide our way through this post-pandemic time. Amen.

³ Ibid.