

Jesus is Knocking

John 2:13-22
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First Presbyterian Church
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A father and son once stood looking at a lovely painting entitled “Christ at the Door Knocking.” The painting shows Jesus standing at the door awaiting entrance.

The father said to the boy, “I wonder why they won’t let him in!”

After a moment of thought, the boy replied, “I’ll bet they’re down in the basement, and they can’t hear him knocking.”

If Jesus were to stand outside your door, where would he find you? Would you be there to hear him knocking, or would you be busy somewhere else? Whatever you’re up to, would he be pleased? Would he even be able to catch your eye, draw your attention toward him, or would you just go on not seeing him there, as Jesus stood nearby looking toward you?

In today’s New Testament lesson, Jesus walks into the Temple during a very busy time of the year. People are preparing for the Passover, the sacred remembrance and celebration of God delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt. It’s a good and holy thing for them to be doing.

But something is off. For one thing, Jesus, the Son of God, the blessed Messiah, comes into their presence and they don’t notice him. They’re too busy buying and selling things for the Passover celebration.

Which, as far as they know, is exactly what they’re supposed to be doing. It’s what they’ve been doing every year, generation after generation. The Passover lamb is brought into the temple to be slaughtered as a holy sacrifice. Then a special meal is served at sundown. Seated around a common table, everyone takes turns telling stories about the exodus, the time God liberated their people from captivity.

For Christians preparing to celebrate Easter, the season of Lent is a time of discernment, discerning what it is that has us captive – or captivated – what it is that keeps us from opening the door and allowing Jesus to enter into all the areas of our lives.

For the Israelites – who, again, thought they were doing the right thing – it was the day-to-day activities of life that kept them from letting Jesus in, all the buying and selling, the deal making and busyness. Jesus is wanting to break through all of it and reach them blessing them in unimaginable ways.

“Making a whip of chords, (Jesus drives) all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle,” John tell us. “He (pours) out the coins of the money-changers and overturns their tables.”

He tells those selling doves for the sacrifice to “take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a market-place!” In other words, “Make room for God in this temple, make room for the Lord in your life.”

We all have things in our lives crowding out God, attitudes and activities that have no place for God, habits that have taken hold of us. And we can’t manage to let them go, even if doing so would mean taking hold of God, letting Jesus take us by the hand, letting him lead us in the spirit of Christ’s peace and comfort and blessing. Often, we don’t even realize what’s gotten us off track, it’s just so much a part of life, our life and the world around us.

Take for instance the guy at the train station going from Kansas City to St. Louis. He buys the ticket only to have the clerk tell him Amtrak is running late.

As he’s walking around the station killing time, he sees an arcade machine claiming to tell your name, age, hometown and so forth. The man puts in a quarter and a card pops out, saying: “Your name is Bill Jones. You are 35 years old. You live in Kansas City, and you’re waiting for the train to St. Louis. Amtrak is running late.”

The man is dumbfounded. He can’t believe the machine knows all this. To test it, he puts in another quarter. Another card comes out that reads: “Your name is still Bill Jones. You are still 35 years old. You still live in Kansas City and you’re still waiting for the train to St. Louis. But Amtrak is behind schedule.”

Now he’s totally astounded. How could this be? He decided to try fooling the machine. Running across the street, he pops into a souvenir shop and buys a pair of Groucho Marx glasses; you know, with the funny nose and moustache.

Wearing his silly disguise and walking with a limp, he returns to the train station and puts another quarter in the machine. Out comes the little card:

“Your name is still Bill Jones. You are still 35 years old. You are still from Kansas City waiting for a train to St. Louis. And while you were fooling around, Amtrak left without you.”

While we are fooling around with our usual activities, what is it in life that might be leaving us behind? What might you be missing out on, what might be keeping you from getting where you ought to be, seeing what you ought to see, when it comes God’s presence in your life?

We all have things that distract us from living life more faithfully, more fully, from being the people God would have us be, from receiving the blessing and guidance, the comfort and strength God want for us. Now is as good a time as ever to be thinking and praying about that.

I don’t know how many of you decided to give something up for Lent. I don’t know how meaningful or life changing that might be for you. For many people, it’s a short-lived

practice that doesn't make a long-term difference. Often, it's something you've picked to do or not do with not a whole lot of input from God.

But what if you actually took a good, honest look at your life? What if you spent some time thinking about all the things you do, all the ways you behave. Then prayerfully ask God to show you what change he'd like to see you make, a change that would open you up to God's presence in a truly beautiful and amazing way.

Whether or not you've given something up for Lent, I invite you to spend time preparing to make more room for God in your life. As we come to the Table of the Lord this morning, consider what that change might be, for you – what to give up or take on or work on. As we draw nearer and nearer to Easter, continue to think about this, pray about it over the next four weeks. Make this Lenten season a time of contemplation and discernment, even if it's just 15 or 20 minutes a day, just a little time each day that you set aside to think about your life in relationship with God.

Listen for Jesus knocking at the door of your life. Consider what it would be like to let him in more fully. What would he find there? What would he like to see driven out? Imagine Jesus with a whip of cords driving out of your life something truly ungodly, un-Christlike, something that would make more room for Jesus and the peace and comfort he brings.

Your body, your mind, your heart, and soul – all of it is there to be transformed and built up as a temple to the Lord, renewed and reborn through your faith in God. Won't you let the Lord into your life, let him look around and show you some things, show you things he can help you to change? Jesus is at the door knocking. Why not let him into your life a little deeper, let him in as you prepare for Easter this year, and as you prepare for Communion this morning. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

God of Eternal Love, as we make and renew our commitment to you, we start a new journey into purposeful growth. We thank you for helping us to remain faithful through the presence of your guidance and strength.

Teach us to pray with faith and read your word with understanding. Teach us to worship with passion and gather together with love.

Teach us to give generously, serve compassionately and use our time mindfully, so that we may reflect your goodness, and that others may discover your grace through us.

We pray for those who feel the need for you more urgently this day, and particularly victims of tragic acts of violence. We pray also for those dealing with life's many struggles – workplace struggles, financial worries, health and mobility issues, illness, and disease. We pray for those who grieve.

We pray all this in faith, as we raise our eyes to heaven and our voices in song, praying the prayer that you taught us, singing:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.