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A POWER LIKE NO OTHER
Matthew 28:1-10
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Why Jesus? Why am I a Christ-follower, a disciple of Jesus? Why do I want others to know him and to serve him?

On Palm Sunday, we said He is a king like no other. On Good Friday, we said He is a love like no other. Today, we recognize that He is a power like no other because today we celebrate his resurrection from the dead.

Now we all know some of the things that means for us. It means death is not the end of the story. We can expect to live forever with God. We will be reunited with our loved ones. Nothing is impossible with God. All of those things are good and possible because the grave could not hold Jesus. We say in the Apostles' Creed that we believe in "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting".

Only, I want to shift the metaphor away from the rather general "resurrection of the dead" as a future gift to the rich symbolism of "opening a door". What happened on this day 2000 years ago is that God opened a door and we have the choice of walking through that door or not into a life of courageous service with Jesus.

Doors Opened

You may not realize it, but all kinds of doors get opened in Matthew's story of resurrection. (You have probably noticed that there are significant differences in the resurrection stories in the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Some people suggest this means the story is not true. However, imagine four people standing on a corner and observing a traffic accident. Ask each one what happened and each will have his or her own version. The gospel writers tell the resurrection story from their perspectives and according to the audience for whom they are writing.)

One open door says "Men aren't as tough as they think they are." I love the way Matthew tells it. Mighty Roman guards are posted to make sure the disciples do not steal the body of Jesus and then claim he has risen. However, when an angel of the Lord appears and rolls away the stone, these tough guys literally fall down as dead. They pass out.

Have any of you ever passed out in fear? I have. In the second grade, I stood in a long line in the hallway of my elementary school. I was waiting for my "chance" to get a polio vaccine shot. If there was one thing I did not like, did not tolerate, was needles poking my skin. The closer I got to my turn, the sicker I felt. Then it happened. I collapsed in a dead faint. The next thing I knew, I was sitting on the stage in the auditorium with a huge fan

blowing on me. The teachers nicely spread the word that I just got too hot. I knew it was because I was afraid.

I almost did the same thing when I was in high school. Some of us guys went camping on the Trinity River in East Texas. We fished, swam in the river, hiked through the woods. We had a great time. The next night I was home in my own bed when I awoke about 3:00 a.m. scratching my face and chest as hard as I could. I had never itched that badly in all my life. I can still remember it. What's going on? I got out of bed and made it into the bathroom, turned on the light, looked in the mirror, and what I saw was a monster. It wasn't me. It was some creature with puffy, scaly, oozing skin. I felt my knees start to buckle. My head began to spin. I grabbed the sink to keep from falling. And then I did what any teenage boy would do. I yelled, "Mama, help me!"

These guards represent the mighty Roman government, the occupying force in Jerusalem, and they pass out in fear. Matthew seems to be saying that even the government is powerless to stop Jesus. Don't be afraid of those who want to keep you "tombbed" up. They can't do it if you walk with Jesus through the door.

Another open door says "Women are okay in God's eyes". For the first 27 chapters of Matthew, the story is mainly about the men who followed Jesus. Then on the most important morning the world has ever seen, God just seems to turn everything over to the women. The men have had it long enough. Now it's the women's turn. On this morning, the women are the first to get the news of resurrection. They are the first evangelists sent to tell others. The angel sends them to tell the rest of the disciples that Jesus is risen and wants to see them in Galilee. This happens in a culture where women could not even testify in court because they were deemed untrustworthy gossips. Who said God doesn't want women to be leaders in the church? A door opened up.

The women actually run to tell the disciples what they have heard. On the way, they see Jesus, fall at his feet, and worship him. Jesus tells them to get up and keep running. Here is another door opening. It is in the midst of fulfilling their mission that they encounter Jesus. The disciples are probably still at home in bed, sleeping off a horrific weekend when their leader was hung on a cross. Isn't it interesting that Jesus doesn't go to where they are to wake them up? He sends the women to get them out of bed so they can get over to Galilee where he will see them. Many of us can testify that it is often as we go in mission that we have our most significant encounters with the risen Jesus. We can worship in the most beautiful cathedral or most exciting worship service and still not experience the power of the risen Jesus like we do when we are in mission, serving others, spreading the word of God's love. If someone sits around complaining that they have never experienced the risen Jesus, we need to tell them to get up and go to Galilee. You will see Jesus there.

Galilee. Another door opened. The death and burial of Jesus took place in Jerusalem. Jerusalem had been the religious and political center of Jewish life for 1000 years. It would be the logical place for Jesus to start a religious movement. But he wants to meet up with the disciples in Galilee. Why? Because the gospel is to be a world-wide movement. It is not for the Jews only. Galilee was known as "Galilee of the Gentiles". Galilee is the beginning place for the world-wide mission of the gospel. In the resurrection of Jesus, the door is opened for the whole world to walk through.

We are asking, Why Jesus? Because Jesus opens doors and we have the choice of walking through them or not into a life of courageous service with Jesus.

Faith, not just Fact

Now let me be honest with you. If the death of Jesus were the whole story, I wouldn't be too interested in following him. Many false saviors have come and gone. When they died, they were forgotten.

Let me confess one other thing. If Easter is only about where I might spend eternity, or whom I might see after I die, then I think we have been shortchanged. If it is nothing more than an insurance policy for the hereafter, then God is playing a cruel game with us. It really is "pie in the sky by and by", nothing for me 'til I die.

Here is what I am getting at. Easter is not just about resurrection fact. It is about resurrection faith. It is about walking through the door to become courageous, white-hot disciples of Jesus Christ who give their lives to make a difference in the world.

You see, I suspect it is possible to believe that Jesus rose from the dead while never walking through the open door he provides for us. I don't just suspect it. There have been times when I have been a living example of it.

There have been times when I have been more like the guards who passed out in fear at the sight of God instead of like the two Marys who ran quickly to tell the boys that Jesus is risen from the dead. I am more like the sleeping disciples.

Presumably, one could "witness" the resurrection, see it, see the risen Jesus, and still not have resurrection faith. Resurrection fact could give me the comfort of knowing something about life after death, but the fact of resurrection does not automatically lead to faith. Resurrection faith is more than believing in a fact about how a body that was dead came back to life. Resurrection faith is not mere belief in an after-life. Resurrection faith is a life lived in service to the One who died and yet rose again and empowers us to

make a difference in the world. Does the resurrection of Jesus lead us to a life of faith in him, trusting him, doing what he does, becoming a disciple, choosing life instead of death?

Resurrection means the door is open. Jesus is a power like no other. The power is the power to get us out of our tombs, the power to cause us to walk through doors that we have cowered behind for too long, the power to turn us into courageous white-hot servants of Jesus. To go where he wants us to go. To send us running to tell others and to work for the healing and peace of the world.

Walking through the Door

What door has he opened for you? What tomb of your own making has been holding you back? What door does he want you to walk through today? To engage in mission? To straighten out a relationship? To come clean? To kick a habit? To find a worthy purpose for your life? Is it to become more outwardly focused?

What door is Jesus opening for me today? To what new kind of life is he inviting me? I believe he is opening the door for me to become a more effective leader. Everything I read says that the key to the health, vision, and growth of a church is the leader. I know what I need to do different. I know what I need to stop doing and what I need to start doing. Jesus empowers me to walk through that door.

Jesus is opening a door for this congregation through our "Growing to Serve" campaign. Through this campaign we will build a building and expand our ministry. We can't just sit by when there are so many people missing the peace, purpose, and promise of God. Jesus wants us to get up out of our tombs of indifference or fear and go for it, to be a juggernaut of grace and love. I believe we are going to walk through that door and take the risk of making commitments that will help us make a difference.

What door is he opening for you?

Today we open the door in our "radical renovation" wall as a symbol and invitation. As the choir sings, I invite you to walk literally through this door - from whatever God is freeing you to whatever God is calling you to do and to be.

He is risen so that we might rise with him. He has opened the door.