

It doesn't matter how you get in ... just get in!

John 20:19-31

April 15, 2007

[Solicit and interview three volunteers from the congregation:

- 1) a person for whom faith comes easily, who sees evidence of God everywhere, who has embraced the story of Jesus for as long as they can remember;
- 2) a person who comes to faith with many questions, with a healthy dose of skepticism, who is serious about following Jesus, but has a hard time accepting some things about Jesus' story or at least about the way the story is often told;
- 3) a person who experienced a dramatic spiritual awakening, a dramatic spiritual conversion, who can point to a specific time, a specific event, when their life was changed forever.]

Three different people with three different stories of faith. My question for you is this: which of them has a faith that is genuine?

These are just three stories. If we had time to listen to a hundred of you tell your faith stories, I'm sure we would have a hundred different stories, a hundred different ways of expressing -- and living -- a faith that is genuine.

But my point is not merely that we are all different from each other, as different in the ways we believe as we are different in so many other ways. My point is that while genuine faith comes in many different forms, what makes it genuine remains the same. Genuine faith may begin in many different places, but it always ends up in the same place!

You've heard it said: there are many ways up the mountain, but at the top of the mountain, all paths converge. That analogy makes the point, but there are things about this particular analogy I do not like. Once you reach the top of the mountain, your quest is finished. There is nothing left to do but to go back down.

I like better the analogy of many doors into one house. Once you get inside (or are let inside) the house, you have a place to be, you have a place to live, you have a new home. Faith is not so much a journey toward some far destination, but a way of being -- now and then and forever.

But there are many different doors, many different ways into the house!

Some of you entered the house when someone invited you in ... your mother, your father, a friend. They showed you the way. They told you the stories. They introduced you to Jesus. They opened a door for you.

Some of you stumbled upon a door into that house when you were lost or desperate or spiritually homeless. You bottomed out. You reached a dead end. You were looking for any place that might take you in. You went through the door and found a home. You went through the door and found Jesus.

Some of you looked at lots of different houses and talked to the people who lived in them, and decided after some deliberation where it was that you wanted to live, and you chose this door. You chose to live in Jesus' house.

Some of you watched the people go in and out of the house. You saw their joy and their laughter, their sense of purpose and commitment to service and genuine kindness, and you knew you wanted to live there, too.

Some of you can't remember ever not being in that house, and yet you know you are there now because you have chosen to live there, because you would not want to live anywhere else but in Jesus' house.

You may have entered the house through the door of brokenness or the door of grief or the door of emptiness or the door of longing or the door of acceptance or the door of righteousness or the door of justice or the door of peace or the door of family. But however you got in, you are in! You are inside the house with all the others who came in through different doors, but as you all live together in the house, as your faith grows deeper and stronger, your faith will look more and more the same, because your faith is shaped, you are shaped, by your relationship with the master of the house, with Jesus.

Genuine faith always bears the same identifying marks: humility, joy, gentleness, patience, love, peacefulness, faithfulness. If any faith does not bear these marks, it is not a genuine faith, or at least it shows that it does not know the master of the house very well at all. The deeper and stronger and more genuine faith becomes, the more it knows, the more it acknowledges, its utter dependence on God, and the more it knows, the more it acknowledges, that Jesus is the master of the house. Jesus is Lord!

We read this morning the story of "doubting Thomas" from the gospel of John. But I want to tell you that this is not really a story about doubt, but a story about faith! Thomas just goes through a different door, but he's in the house!

Thomas was not there the first time Jesus showed himself to the group of gathered disciples. He is skeptical, practical, reasonable. (Do we have any skeptical, practical, reasonable people among us?) He will not let himself be swept away by the extraordinary claim that Jesus is alive until he sees things -- sees Jesus -- for himself. He sets the conditions under which he will be willing to accept the fact that Jesus is indeed alive.

And what does Jesus do?

Jesus accepts those conditions! Jesus accommodates Thomas! Jesus does not demand that Thomas come to faith on Jesus' own terms, but gives Thomas the opportunity to come to faith on the terms Thomas himself has set. Amazing! Amazing grace!

Jesus shows himself to Thomas. He invites Thomas to take his hands and to touch his side ... and Thomas believes. "My Lord and my God," Thomas says. It is as clear and as powerful as any confession of faith in any of the gospels. And it's personal: my Lord, my God.

At some point in your life, you will stand before a door, or a door will be opened in front of you and you will be invited to enter. It doesn't matter which door it is or how you get in. Just get in! Don't stay outside!

And once you are inside, as many of you are, don't just stand in the doorway! Move in deeper into the house. Explore its many rooms. Get to know all the different people who live there with you. And, by all means, be sure to get to know the master of the house!