

EASTER: IN FAITH WE CELEBRATE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Second Sunday of Easter

April 15, 2007

Acts 5:27-32

Psalm 118:14-29 or Psalm 150

Revelation 1:4-8

John 20:19-31

Locked out? Locked in?

Behold! Behold! I stand at the door and knock, knock, knock.
Behold! Behold! I stand at the door and knock, knock, knock.
If any girl hear my voice; if any boy hear my voice
And will open, open, open the door,
I will come in!

As a child I can well remember learning this song while gazing at the front of the room at Church School where there was a picture of Jesus standing at a door – a door with no handle on the outside. Was Jesus locked out? The message of the song, based on Revelation 3:20, was that I, on the other side, needed to open the door and let Jesus in. It was I who was “locked in” and I needed to invite Jesus into my heart to experience the joy and peace that he offers.

This week’s Gospel text portrays the disciples “locked in” behind doors. Not only are the disciples hiding behind locked doors, they are also locked in fear. Earlier that same day, Mary Magdalene announced to the disciples that she had seen the Lord (John 20:18). Did they not believe her? Then, in the midst of their fear and confusion, the risen Christ appears and greets them with words of peace. His words fulfill his promised gift of peace (John 14:27) and the assurance that sorrow would give way to joy (John 16:20-22).

When Jesus stands among the disciples and provides the evidence that he has been raised from death (verse 20), it is only then that they rejoice. Thomas, however, is not present. When the disciples tell him that they have seen the Lord (using the same words that Mary Magdalene proclaimed to them), Thomas doubts and he, too, indicates his need for evidence before he will believe.

What does it take for us to believe? To those of us who are experiencing fear and doubt, do we perceive Jesus standing outside the door? Do we hear him knocking? Will we open the doors of our hearts and invite him in? The words from John’s Gospel call us “to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing [we] may have life in his name” (John 20:31, *NRSV*).

As Jesus was sent by the Father, so now he sends us forth and commissions us to continue the work God had sent him to do (John 20:21-23). Like those first disciples, we, too, are empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim that Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

This week's Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: **Chad** – With thanks to God that Bible work is progressing, and with prayers for the launch of the Sar Bible and the Gulay New Testament, for the launch of the HIV/AIDS program, and that the *Faith Comes By Hearing* program will become more widely established in rural areas, and with prayers for the completion of Bible House and for political stability; **Sudan** – With thanks to God that, following the signing of a peace agreement, Scripture distribution can now take place in new areas, with prayers for people in the south where food is scarce, and for the Darfur region, where thousands of people have been displaced or killed, and with prayers for the spreading of God's Word through the **Jesus** film; **Eritrea** – With thanks to God that the Tigrigna Talking Bible has been so well accepted by users, and with prayers for the Bilen translation project and for a permanent resolution of the conflict with Ethiopia; **Ethiopia** – With thanks to God for increased Scripture distribution, and with prayers for the twelve translation projects currently in hand, for the HIV/AIDS project, and for Bible work in Djibouti.

Activity Corner: “Unlocked Hearts for Jesus”

Supplies needed: Bible; construction paper; heart pattern (approximately 3”x 4”); pens or pencils; scissors.

Fold a sheet of construction paper in half so that it measures 5-1/2” x 8-1/2” and trace a heart so that one side of the heart is against the fold. Cut out the heart so that both sides remain attached at the fold. On the front, copy the words from Revelation 3:20. On the inside, copy the words from John 20:19 (*Jesus said: Peace be with you*) on the left side. On the right side, write a prayer, thanking God for raising Jesus to life, and expressing your joy because you have invited Jesus into your heart.