SUNDAY, APRIL 29, 1984

"CLOSED DOORS AND OPEN MINDS" Brok 13

JOHN 20:19-31

IN ALL THE CELEBRATION AND FESTIVITY OF EASTER, WE SOMETIMES FORGET WHAT HAPPENED AFTER EASTER.

AFTER THE EXPERIENCE OF THE RESURRECTION ON THAT FIRST EASTER SUNDAY, THE CLOSE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WERE EXCITED, YET CONFUSED, AND THEY WERE ALSO AFRAID. AS WE READ EARLIER, THE GOSPEL OF JOHN STATES, "ON THE EVENING OF THAT DAY, THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, THE DOORS BEING SHUT WHERE THE DISCIPLES WERE, FOR FEAR OF THE JEWS, JESUS CAME AND STOOD AMONG THEM AND SAID, 'PEACE BE WITH YOU.'"

MARK'S GOSPEL ALSO DESCRIBES THE DISCIPLES' FEAR. HE WRITES: "AND THEY WENT OUT AND FLED FROM THE TOMB; FOR TREMBLING AND ASTONISHMENT HAD COME UPON THEM; AND THEY SAID NOTHING TO ANYONE, FOR THEY WERE AFRAID."

AT LEAST ONE OF THE 12 ORIGINAL DISCIPLES, THE ONE NAMED THOMAS, WAS FILLED WITH DOUBT AFTER EASTER. HE HAD NOT BEEN PRESENT ON THAT FIRST EASTER SUNDAY NIGHT BEHIND THE CLOSED DOORS WHEN JESUS APPEARED TO THE OTHERS, AND WHEN HE WAS LATER TOLD ABOUT IT, HE REPLIED, "UNLESS I SEE IN HIS HANDS THE PRINT OF THE NAILS, AND PLACE MY FINGER IN THE MARK OF THE NAILS AND PLACE MY HAND IN HIS SIDE, I WILL NOT BELIEVE."

A WEEK LATER WHEN JESUS AGAIN APPEARED AMONG THE DISCIPLES, THOMAS WAS WITH THEM, AND HE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE THE NAIL PRINTS, AND HE BECAME A BELIEVER.

DURING THE SEVERAL WEEKS THAT FOLLOWED EASTER, JESUS WOULD APPEAR TO THE DISCIPLES AND THEN DISAPPEAR. HE WAS WITH THEM, YET NOT WITH THEM. WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT, NO ONE KNEW. THE DISCIPLES WERE NOT SURE WHAT TO DO. FOR THE MOST PART THEY STAYED BEHIND CLOSED DOORS. THEY STAYED TOGETHER. AND WHEN THEY ATE TOGETHER, THEY TOOK BREAD AND WINE AND RE-ENACTED THE "LAST SUPPER." AND, TO THEIR CREDIT, THEIR MINDS WERE OPEN AND WAITING.

SOMETIMES THE BEST THING WE CAN DO IS WAIT. IN FACT, DURING THE 40 DAY PERIOD AFTER THE RESURRECTION, JESUS GAVE HIS DISCIPLES ONLY ONE SPECIFIC INSTRUCTION, "WAIT." HE SAID, "STAY IN JERUSALEM AND WAIT FOR THE PROMISE OF GOD." IN OTHER WORDS, IF YOU WAIT WITH PATIENCE AND DON'T PANIC, AFTER A BRIEF TIME, ALL OF WHAT HAS HAPPENED WILL BEGIN TO MAKE SENSE TO YOU, AND YOU WILL THEN KNOW WHAT TO DO. IT'S ALL RIGHT TO STAY BEHIND CLOSED DOORS, BUT KEEP YOUR MINDS OPEN AND WAITING.

IT'S GOOD ADVICE. SOMETIMES WE HAVE TO WAIT. WHEN AN OVERWHELMING EXPERIENCE OR SURPRISING CHANGE COMES INTO OUR LIVES AND WE AREN'T SURE WHAT IT MEANS, THEN WAIT! DON'T ACT ON IT TOO SOON. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE ARE TOO MUCH IN A HURRY, AND WE DO THINGS WHILE WE

ARE STILL CONFUSED OR BEFORE WE HAVE ANY SENSE OF DIRECTION.

YET ALL OF US KNOW THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE MOST DIFFICULT THING IN THE WORLD IS TO WAIT, ESPECIALLY WITH OPEN MINDS.

SOME KINDS OF WAITING, OF COURSE, ARE NOT GOOD. THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO TRY TO ESCAPE LIFE BY WAITING AND NEVER DOING ANYTHING. THEY HAVE NO ENERGY BECAUSE THEY DARE NOT FACE LIFE. SOME PEOPLE DREAD MAKING DECISIONS AND PUT OFF ACTION AS LONG AS POSSIBLE OR UNTIL THEY ARE FORCED BY EVENTS TO TAKE ACTION. PERHAPS YOU'VE HEARD PEOPLE SAY THEY ARE WAITING FOR THEIR "SHIP TO COME IN." THE PROBLEM IS THAT THEY MAY NOT HAVE SENT A SHIP OUT, SO THERE IS NO SHIP TO COME IN.

JESUS ASKED HIS FOLLOWERS TO WAIT WITH TRUST AND HOPE. "WAIT FOR THE PROMISE OF GOD TO BE FULFILLED." THERE ARE SOME THINGS THAT CANNOT BE HURRIED.

THIS KIND OF WAITING IS EXPECTANT WAITING. IT IS WAITING WITH AN OPENNESS TO THE FUTURE AND WAITING WITH CONFIDENCE THAT GOD IS WORKING IN AND THROUGH OUR WAITING.

ASK YOURSELF THIS MORNING, "WHAT ARE YOU IN A HURRY ABOUT?" "WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?" "ARE YOU WAITING WITH AN OPEN MIND?" WHEN WE WAIT WITH OPEN MINDS, THEN WE ALSO EXPERIENCE SOME PLEASANT SURPRISES. IF OUR MINDS ARE

CLOSED, WE MAY MISS WHAT WAS INTENDED FOR US BECAUSE WE WERE EXPECTING SOMETHING ELSE.

THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE IN OUR WAITING FOR GOD. USUALLY WHEN WE THINK OF GOD AND WHERE WE WILL EXPERIENCE GOD, WE THINK OF THE LIKELY PLACES: IN AN UPLIFTING WORSHIP EVENT; IN LOVE FREELY GIVEN US FROM ANOTHER PERSON; IN AN INTIMATE TIME OF PRAYER -- AND WE DO EXPERIENCE GOD IN SUCH PLACES.

BUT IN THE WAITING OF THE DISCIPLES FOLLOWING EASTER, THEY ALSO LEARNED THAT GOD CAN BE EXPERIENCED IN SOME UNLIKELY PLACES -- EVEN IN FEAR BEHIND CLOSED DOORS -- IF THEY KEPT THEIR MINDS OPEN. GOD IN UNLIKELY AND SURPRISING PLACES -- ALL THROUGH THE BIBLE WE READ OF THE EXPERIENCE OF INDIVIDUALS WHO DISCOVERED GOD WHEN THEY DID NOT EXPECT IT.

THAT'S THE STORY OF JESUS CHRIST! GOD IN A STABLE; GOD IN A CARPENTER WHO BECAME AN ITINERANT PREACHER; GOD FORGIVING SINNERS THAT OTHERS WOULD NOT FORGIVE; GOD ON A CROSS; GOD IN AN EMPTY TOMB; GOD IN THE SIMPLE CEREMONY OF BREAKING BREAD AND SHARING A CUP; GOD AMONG THE SUFFERING AND THE SICK; GOD AMONG THE POOR AND THE LONELY. THUS JESUS SAID, "INASMUCH AS YOU DID IT TO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS, YOU DID IT UNTO ME."

SO THIS MORNING, WAIT FOR GOD; DO NOT BE IN A HURRY. WAIT WITH AN OPEN MIND AND AN EXPECTANT SPIRIT. AMEN.