

Title: Panic Room – First Presbyterian, Franklin, TN
Text: John 20:19-31
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Today's text describes a night in a locked room: not loud or chaotic, but quiet, somber, and terrifying. The silence feels heavy, like a dark cloud inside the room. Maybe someone's foot is tapping. Maybe someone is staring at the door as though the next sound, the next moment, will decide everything.

John describes for us plainly: "*the doors were locked for fear.*" The doors are locked. Not just because someone wanted privacy, but because they were afraid. Afraid of what had happened. Afraid of what might happen next. Afraid that everything they had trusted and believed had suddenly slipped through their fingers. They were shocked into a paralyzing fear!

This image feels strangely familiar to us. Not just as a congregation, but as a community living in 2026. Franklin is a vibrant place — growing, historic, hopeful — but we feel the world's anxieties touching our lives too. We read headlines about wars abroad. We hear about neighbors struggling with the cost of groceries and rising home prices. Young parents at school drop-off whisper fears about safety. Adults are lying awake, concerned about jobs or aging parents. Seniors are wondering if they've outlived their purpose.

Fear has a way of creating a "panic room" type moment — not only physical ones, but emotional and spiritual ones, secured with habits, assumptions, and often silence.

We create panic rooms when we:

- Withdraw from conversations that make us uncomfortable and keep a false peace.
- Close our hearts to those who think differently.
- Shield ourselves with certainty instead of seeking understanding.

So, what would it have been like in that room with the disciples? They had watched Jesus as he was taken away to die. Their hope was extinguished and buried. And behind locked doors, they huddled in deep fear. And yet, on that night, something incredible happens.

John says, "Jesus came and stood among them..." John doesn't explain *how*. He just says it happened as fact. He tells us the doors were locked, and yet Jesus *came anyway*.

Not knocking politely and asking permission. He was suddenly present among them in the middle of their fear. And notice what Jesus says first. He says, "Peace be with you." Not "Greetings" but "Stop being afraid." Jesus does not cast blame. He does not say, "You should have acted differently." Not, "You messed up." He says, "Just peace" be among them. Because that was what was most needed in the moment. Jesus, offering peace, gave them a calorie of hope.

This peace offered is not a quick pronouncement. This peace is not the kind of fleeting, superficial calm that vanishes when you turn the news back on. This is resurrection peace, which says: "*God has the last word and is not finished. God is not absent but present. At the end of the day, God is still God and God loves the whole world, including the ones locked behind the door of fear.*"

Jesus offers them His hands and His side. The wounds are not hidden. They are displayed not as shame, but as the scars of victory. And he is known by his scars, like we will be known by ours.

Friends, the resurrection peace does not erase the cruelty of the cross. Rather, “resurrection peace” *transfigures* it. The wounds stay, so we will know it’s the same Jesus who loved them to the very end. And here is the shock of hope: The risen Christ does not show up when the doors are open. Jesus, rather, shows up *while the doors are still locked*. Then Jesus says something even more startling: “*As the (Abba) Father has sent me, so I send you.*”

Now, if we were in that room, what would we do next? We would probably stay put and double-check the locks. We would make sure the grocery run was done and stock up on more supplies. Maybe we will write a will.

But Jesus shows up in the middle of the disciples’ fear and says, “No. I’m sending you.” Not when they were safe. Not when they were confident. Not when they had it all figured out. But just *as they were*: afraid, uncertain, and still processing what had just happened.

Right now, in Franklin, TN, First Presbyterian Church isn’t called to be a panic room where we cling to certainty or shield ourselves from discomfort and pain this world offers. Our call as a church reflects those disciples’ call back then. As Jesus sent them, we also are called into the world with resurrection peace that overcomes fear.

We are called into neighborhoods where loneliness still stalks. We are called to go into schools where children are learning how to be kind and loving. We are called to enter workplaces where moral and spiritual questions are not simple. We are called to bear witness to love to those in prison, either the physical kind or those emotional prisons that trap so many today.

Then Jesus breathes on them and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Not for safety or for insulation. Rather, the Holy Spirit guides them into mission. And that mission is not easy. We are given a difficult mission. Our mission includes reconciliation in a world that prefers division, which is hard. Our mission is to foster a spirit of understanding in a time that others prefer to shout. Our purpose is to offer the love of Jesus, even when love is costly. Our mission is to lift those suffering from injustice and persecution because of the color of their skin.

But let’s not forget Thomas. He was not there, and our tradition gives him his unfair nickname, “Doubting Thomas,” as if doubt were his problem. Yet, I want us to listen closely to the story.

The text is clear. Thomas doesn’t refuse faith. What he does refuse is *pretend faith*. He wants the truth. He says, “Unless I see... unless I touch... I will not believe.” Thomas is not peacocking in this text. His questioning is a true, honest wrestling with his faith. And notice Jesus meets him right there in his doubt.

A week later, and the same locked doors, Jesus returns and says again, “Peace.” Then he invites Thomas to see for himself. Jesus says, “Put your finger here... see my hands...”

Jesus offers Thomas no rebuke or frustration. Jesus invites Thomas to grow in his faith. And Thomas does the most honest thing a person can do. He names what he sees and what he believes. He says, “My Lord and my God.”

Thomas moves honest doubt into a confession of faith, and not weak, not tentative belief. Thomas is bold and the first one in scripture to express his understanding of Jesus as both human and God.

And precisely at this moment is where the surprise of the gospel turns everything upside down. We often think of panic rooms as places to *stay safe*. But here's the shock: Jesus doesn't open the door for them. They are left to do their work and to move from fear to faith.

Yet when they do leave the room and come out of their fear, John doesn't describe Jesus turning the hinges, sliding back the lock, and opening the door. No. Just suddenly, we know the disciples are *out* and without the drama of unlocked doors. As if the room wasn't what held them.

And I think it is precisely here that what's been transformed is made clear: **Their fear no longer determines their direction, and their trust in Christ grows and offers them purpose.**

The miracle was never the opening of the door. The real miracle was the changing of their hearts. The wall that once felt like protection now stands behind them, no longer locking them in a cage and defining them. And friends, that's our good news today.

Our own panic rooms are not the final stop, nor are they something to be ashamed of. Our panic rooms are the place where we finally meet Him — not as conquerors — but as needy, honest people who have encountered the living Christ.

So, what does this story mean for us? At First Presbyterian, we are not called to build more panic rooms. Rather, we are called to be sent to the world and carry resurrection peace into the world. Not a naïve peace that hides from the brokenness of the world, desperate for justice and righteousness as witnessed in the scriptures. Our call is to offer resurrection peace that comes from an authentic encounter with the living Jesus, with our own scars that tell a beautiful story. We are sent into the world to live out Christ's peace:

- In our homes, where disagreements can feel permanent.
- In our community, where people are lonely even in a crowd.
- In our schools, children need models of grace.
- In our workplaces, where integrity costs something.
- In our local ministries of Hard Bargain builds, partnering with Room In the Inn's Saturday feeding program, youth programs' mission trips — where love is not optional, it's action made possible by our ministry volunteers.
- In taking a bold stance against the world's injustice and advocating for reconciliation.

We don't need to remove all fear, and we never will. But we do get to carry hope that casts out fear. So, if we find ourselves in a panic room today... If fear is whispering in the background of our life... If anxiety is shaping our choices... If uncertainty feels bigger than our trust... Look to Jesus, who offers his scars and carries his wounds so we can experience and offer hope.

Friends, he is already here, standing among you. He doesn't wait for the door to open. He walks through it. He speaks about our peace. He breathes life and hope. Then, here is the surprise: Jesus sends us out. Not away from the world in fear, but into it with peace that overcomes fear.

Friends, when fear says, "Stay in," Christ says, "Go out with peace." When panic whispers, "Hide," Christ says, "Take courage." When anxiety tells us the world is too complicated, Christ says, "I am with you." And that is enough. For *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed.*