

Sermon for Sunday, April 2, 1978, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"DOING A HOUDINI ON LOCKED DOORS"

St. John 20:19-29

Text: "On the evening of that 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 to them, "Peace be with you." St. John 20:19

Each one of us this morning has great resources, both physical and mental, that are virtually untapped. Each one of us is capable of doing greater and better things than he is presently doing. Each one of us had goldmines of potential that have not yet been mined.

For example, most persons go through life with great physical resources that are virtually unrealized. Some of our greatest athletes have been produced because some physical disability made them reach down to tap the hidden resources of their bodies. An Olympic swimmer became a champion because her legs were once paralyzed by polio. A champion distance runner came into existence because as a child he was told that he might never walk again.

Perhaps you remember the story carried in Reader's Digest some years ago about a truck driver in Houston, Texas named Charlie Jones. Jones had lost his little girl when his home was destroyed by fire and in his soul there was born a deep and abiding hatred of fire. Over a year later Jones came upon a wreck near Houston. A fourteen-wheel truck-trailer had piled into a huge oak tree and the driver was pinned in the wreckage. A wrecker had been hooked to the cab in an attempt to free the driver, but three trucks working with the wrecker had not been able to pull the cab apart sufficiently to free the driver. Flames began to lap about the cab and with no fire extinguisher there, it seemed as though the driver would be burned to death. It was then that Charlie Jones tapped a hidden physical resource that he never knew existed. With his bare hands he ripped off the crumpled, jammed door of the cab; with his hands he bent the steering wheel out of the way; with his hands he practically tore out the brake and clutch pedals that trapped the victims feet. With his shoulders he bent the top of the cab upwards and freed the driver. A deputy sheriff said this about the incident, "If I hadn't witnessed it, I'd never believe a lone man could do a job we couldn't do with three trucks and a wrecker." When interviewed Charlie Jones said, "A man don't know what he can do until he sees another man hurtin'."

But in addition to untapped physical resources, all of us have mental powers and capabilities that are also untapped. Psychologists tell us that many of us use as little as ten percent of our mental capacities and that few if any of us develop our total mental capabilities. For example, I read a story once about a street car conductor from Canada who was taken into the service during World War I. Before the war was over, he had risen to the rank of General! Imagine that! From Street Car Conductor to General! Here was a man with vast, untapped mental capabilities. As a conductor he used only a small part of his mental resources. Like the rails of his vehicle, his mind was limited to a narrow, repetitious rut. Yet, under new circumstances, new stimuli, new challenges, he tapped into a great reserve of mental powers and resources that had never been touched.

I remember hearing a speech by Catherine Marshall not long after she wrote her famous book about her husband, "A Man Called Peter." She said, "I had never dreamed that I could actually write and the undertaking of a story of Peter's life seemed far beyond my abilities. Yet, by God's grace I went to work and finished it in nine months time." Catherine Marshall had a goldmine of talent that had lain untapped. And while we can't all be successful writers, each of us had vast reservoirs of mental potential that probably we will never exploit. Very likely few of us will ever stretch our mental potential to the horizons of which we are capable.

Here is the second secret. Jesus came to that locked room and said "peace be unto you. And then the Bible says, "When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side." Recently I was reading a psychological journal and it was relating how in the early days of psychotherapy a clinic was established to deal strictly with guilt feelings. You see, most of us have tremendous feelings of guilt. All of us do things we were trained not to do. We say things, we do things, we act in ways that we know are wrong. And as a result we have guilt about it. Our conscience begins to hurt. We may repress that feeling, but deep in the recesses of the unconscious mind it is still at work, eating away at us. One approach to psychotherapy has been to do away with our guilt feelings. The therapist acts to convince the patient that his guilt feelings are unrealistic. You see, if I can be convinced that nothing I do or say or think is wrong, then I am freed to live as I please. Unfortunately, this simply doesn't work. No, I really don't need to be freed from any moral standards, any concept of right and wrong. What I really need is to be told that I am forgiven. And isn't that what Jesus did? He showed them his hands and his side. He showed them marks of Calvary. He showed them how he had paid the price for their forgiveness

Isn't that what you and I need? We don't need to be told there is no right or wrong, for we know there is. No, what we do need to be told is that we are forgiven. And when we know that God loves us and forgives us; when we know that he has paid the price of our sins, we are freed from our prisons of guilt. God does a Houdini on our prison of guilt and frees us--not because we are good, not because there are no moral standards, but because we are forgiven--he showed them his hands and his side.

Have you been living the life God wants you to live? Are you doing the things God wants you to do? Well, you know you have not. But God does a Houdini on your prison of guilt--he opens the doors to freedom and forgiveness for Jesus has paid for your sins.

Here is the third secret for escaping from locked doors. First, Jesus said to the disciples in their locked room, "Peace be unto you." Next he showed them his hands and his side, the symbol of their forgiveness. Next the Bible says, "He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" Here God offers us spiritual power. It was in that power that the disciples left that locked room to go out to win the world for Jesus!

Do you need spiritual power in your life this morning? Most of us do. We are not living triumphant, victorious lives for Jesus and that's because we don't have any spiritual power. Would you like to have that power this morning? Let me tell you the story of Fulton Oursler, one of our best known Christian writers who gave us such books as The Greatest Story Ever Told. Fulton Oursler was not always a Christian. At thirty he was a self-styled agnostic who believed there were no absolutes of right and wrong and did not believe in anything approaching the supernatural. He once wrote, "I sneered at God as an elaborate self-deception and did all that I could to tear down the faith of those close to me." Yet, the day came that Fulton Oursler was out of a job, his health failed him, and his marriage was in serious trouble. He was absolutely helpless to do anything for himself. At the end of his own rope he ventured into a church. He tells what happened in this way, "In ten minutes or less I may change my mind," he prayed. "I may scoff at this--and love error again. Pay no attention to me then. For this little time I am in right mind and heart. This is my best. Take it and forget the rest; and if you are really there, help me." For the first time he was in a prison of helplessness. And when he cried out for help, for new power in his life, God did a Houdini on his prison. In that new spiritual power, 18 books flowed from his pen along with many, many articles.

Do you sometimes feel weak and powerless? Unable to do anything or serve God effectively? He wants to set you free, to put incredible spiritual power in your life. All you have to do is to surrender your heart and your will to him and he will do a Houdini on your locked rooms, he will set you free and give you incredible spiritual power to serve him.

On May 23, 1952, Fulton Oursler was writing a book entitled The Greatest Faith Ever Known, but he was interrupted in mid-sentence. Stricken with a heart attack he died. Then he discovered that God freed him from the last prison of all--he freed him from death and the grave for he discovered that the promise of Jesus was true, "Where I am, there shall you also be." Are you free this morning? Would you like to do a Houdini on your locked doors, the prisons that hold you fast? Jesus is the key. He brings us peace, pardon and power. He has come to open prison doors and set the captives free.