

Our focal scripture reading today is John 20:19-31

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus *or the twin*), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe^u that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

As we move from Easter Sunday of last week, we have an opportunity to linger on the other witnesses of the resurrection.

Last week we met the first witness of the resurrection in the woman at the tomb, Mary, who didn't keep the news of the resurrection to herself.

She went out and told others as the Risen Jesus had instructed her to.

Her witness of the resurrection moved her from mourning to rejoicing, to evangelizing that Jesus Christ had indeed risen from the dead as He had promised He would.

Our scripture this morning opens in that blessed evening of that blessed first day of the week, and our gospel finds the disciples hiding in fear of those who would persecute and even possibly kill them.

They are in a state of unknown fear, having been 'locked down' to remain safe from a very real enemy to them.

They had heard of Mary's witness, but they were still afraid.

They had heard Mary speak her witness herself, but they treated it as though what they had heard was a 'rumor of a resurrection' rather than the account of truth itself that it was.

And now we are suddenly face to face with the other character in this story. The one without a face, but is a very real presence we call 'fear'.

That fear that emanates from the grief of losing a loved one and wondering how you will face the world without their daily presence.

That fear that rises from knowing that the one who lead your movement of liberation has been treated like an enemy combatant and sentenced to death, a death that you watched, and now wondering if you and the other followers are next.

The disciples are in hiding because they are in fear. In fear behind the barrier of a locked door.

Jesus comes in, moving as though there was no door, and no lock, moving through the barrier their fear has placed before Him, and replaces their fear by speaking His words of life.

“Peace be with you.”

Jesus in His resurrected body that moves through a solid locked door, and yet contains the elements of the physical that show the scars of his execution.

Jesus, the miracle worker, presents to them as the ultimate miracle.

In the middle of their fear, Jesus shows up.

In the midst of the wall they had built around themselves to protect themselves, Jesus shows up.

And isn't that how Jesus is with each of us?

Every human being has experienced the trauma of a hurt or a betrayal, or a fearful situation, and our response to that fear of being wounded again is to build up a wall, with a nice padlocked door around ourselves, so that no one can enter in.

And just when we think we have built a sufficient enough wall, Jesus comes in.

Jesus, the one who is no match for any barrier we can construct, comes into our lives and into our presence and asks us to let our guard down, and let Him into our very souls.

Jesus, speaks peace into our fear.

And the disciples, which in this moment excludes Thomas, the scriptures tell us “rejoiced when they saw him” (John 20:20) after Jesus shows them his hands and his sides where the marks of his execution and crucifixion are most evident.

After seeing their beloved Jesus, they rejoiced.

Now the rumors of the resurrection have moved from gossip and rumor to a witness by their own hands and eyes. Seeing the evidence of Jesus’ resurrection for them becomes personal.

And just like Mary on that great ‘getting up morning’ had received instruction from Jesus, the disciples are given not only eye witness, but they were given the Holy Spirit to receive in a new way, and in a way that they will now relate to their fellow human beings around them, to communicate the forgiveness of sins.

But there is still the matter of the one who is absent. Thomas, doubting Thomas. Thomas who doubted the word of the other disciples that Christ though they had seen him dead, still lives.

Thomas doubted. It doesn't say what he believed instead of the account of his brother disciples and Mary. It only says that he doubted.

Thomas doubted and simply wanted to have the same experience that the others had.

When I have the experience for myself, then I will believe" is the mantra of Thomas.

Indeed, the lives of the other disciples were markedly changed by that moment of peace and the presence of the Holy Spirit within them that was brought by Jesus.

How do we know they were changed? John tells us in verse 26 “a week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them, Although the doors were shut...”

Did you notice that? They doors were shut, but the author doesn't say that they were locked.

A closed door that is unlocked allows for entry. This time, a week later, the disciples were no longer locking the door. Perhaps an indication that their fear had subsided, if even just a little.

A closed door gives people entry. A locked door keeps everyone out.

Even though the door is unlocked, it doesn't matter to Jesus, because the scripture once again says Jesus just walked through the door.

Again, Jesus brings peace and speaks the words “Peace be with you”. This time he's clearly come as an answer to Thomas.

He doesn't just come and speak to Thomas, Jesus offers physical evidence and encourages Thomas to explore the evidence of the resurrection that was borne in His very body.

What a moment this is!

It says to all us who doubt, who have been fearful of something, that there is nothing that can keep Jesus from us.

That if we express our doubts out loud, Jesus doesn't destroy us, but He comes to us and offers us what we need to walk with Him in true belief.

The chronic temptation is for us even as believers to stay behind closed doors.

To give in to the fear that dwells within us, rather than trust in what God has sent.

Thomas. Doubting Thomas no longer doubts.

In this scripture we see doubt given what it needs and those living in fear given what they needed to change how they viewed the world around them.

That is the dilemma and the temptation that any church constantly faces.

The temptation is to stay behind locked doors rather than entering the world carrying Jesus with us.

Christ has called the church to go into the world, carrying the proof of the gospel message that is present in our lives as a witness to the world.

I once was lost, but now I'm found is the rallying cry and the living witness to all who see us. That Jesus made a difference in our lives.

One week after Easter, the gifts of the Easter Bunny have long faded in the memory of the children of the world.

Fables weren't intended to last for eternity. The events of the crucifixion, death, and resurrection were because they are integral to the story of humanity.

The world will look at us and look to see the sermon of God printed upon our hearts.

The temptation is for the 'church' to remain behind closed stained glass doors, but the will of Christ is for His church to go out into the world.

The temptation is for us to build up barriers to keep others from getting too close to us, and to protect ourselves from the very world that Christ has sent us into.

The calling is to trust Christ, and if you doubt on occasion, give it to Christ and let Him handle it and show you a way without fear.

Christ met Thomas' doubt not with condemnation, but He offered him peace and grace.

There is much to be fearful of in this world. But Christ has said He has overcome the world.

Where there was once only a virus that crippled the world, God through His work of medicine and scientists has an answer.

In the areas where there is social unrest and injustice, God brings justice that rolls down like a river.

There is power and peace in the grace of God found only in the person of Jesus Christ.

All the disciples were once lost in their fear and in their doubt of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but Christ came into their lives anyway.

We single out Thomas, but at one point most of the disciples doubted that Christ had risen from the dead.

Jesus met them where they were, with His love, peace, gentleness and grace.

As the song lyrics go, through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come.

What are you in fear of today? Give it to Jesus, and let the fact that he has brought you through hard times become your testimony that encourages someone else.

Perhaps you have built up a barricade of locked doors that you have built up around yourself, let Jesus lead you out. Let Him replace fear

with peace. Let Him turn your mourning for what was, into joy for what can be.

Let His grace envelope you.

In Jesus name, Amen.

RESPONSE TO THE WORD: BAPTISM OF MIQUEL TANGWAN

Amen. We praise God for the reminder of our own baptismal vows and for God leading one more family to have their child baptized. If you have questions about baptism, or would like to have your child or family member baptized I encourage you to reach out to me at our church office at YourMtParan@gmail.com

OUR CHALLENGE THIS WEEK:

Perhaps you are hiding behind a door of your own making. Let Jesus in and let Him show you how to go out and let others in, in His name.

At one point most of the disciples doubted, but Jesus didn't chastise them for their doubt, he met them lovingly where they were.

His message to them after they received Him was to go through that same locked door they had had themselves behind and go with Him into the world beyond that door.

Seek Jesus, and do what thus says the Lord.