

Resurrection Encounters: Behind a Closed Door
John 20:19-31
April 23

Scott and Leslie were married and left on their honeymoon. They arrived in the wee hours of the morning at a fancy hotel. Excited, they were looking forward to spending their first night together in a luxurious bed in the hotel's bridal suite. When they got to their room, they found a sofa, a chair, and a table—but no bed. After several minutes, they discovered the sofa was a fold-out bed. They spent a fitful night tossing and turning on a lumpy mattress with sagging springs.

With their honeymoon night ruined, Scott stormed down to the front desk the next morning and gave the clerk a tongue-lashing. "There must be some mistake," the clerk said after checking the reservation. "Did you open the door to the bedroom?"

Scott went back up to the room, opened a door that he thought led to a closet, and discovered the bedroom to the bridal suite. Inside was a king-sized bed with a fruit basket, a box of chocolates, and a dozen red roses.

Completely available . . . yet totally unused!

It's behind a closed door that we find the disciples on "*the evening of that first day of the week.*" John tells us they "*were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders.*"

Jesus had been killed – would they be next? The tomb was found empty, but what does that really mean? Last week we heard that when Peter and "the other disciple" find the tomb empty, they go home. Then next thing we know about them, they are locked behind a closed door, paralyzed by their fear.

I used to wonder how come they didn't get it. I mean, they spent 3 years following Jesus - learning from him, living with him. He even told them what was going to happen and I couldn't understand why they didn't get it. But this week I don't feel so ready to criticize or condemn those disciples.

I've begun to see these fearful disciples are not so different from

you and me. They were so afraid they kept themselves locked behind closed doors.

We might not literally lock ourselves behind closed doors but when our fears and anxiety take over, it's as if we are locked up. We are not experiencing the abundant life God desires for us.

But despite the fact that the disciples had locked themselves away in fear, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

Can you just imagine what it might have been like in that moment? I like how Max Lucado describes the scene in *Six Hours One Friday*:

Every head lifted. Every eye turned. Every mouth dropped open. Someone looked at the door.

It was still locked.

It was a moment the apostles would never forget, a story they would never cease to tell. The stone of the tomb was not enough to keep him in. The walls of the room were not enough to keep him out.

The one betrayed sought his betrayers. What did he say to them? Not "What a bunch of flops!" Not "I told you so." No "Where-were-you-when-I-needed-you?" speeches. But simply one phrase, "Peace be with you." The very thing they didn't have was the very thing he offered: peace.

It was too good to be true! So amazing was the appearance that some were saying, "Pinch me, I'm dreaming" even at the ascension. No wonder they returned to Jerusalem with great joy! No wonder they were always in the temple praising God!

A transformed group stood beside a transformed Peter as he announced some weeks later: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:56)

No timidity in his words. No reluctance. About three thousand people believed his message.

The apostles sparked a movement. The people became followers of the death-conqueror. They couldn't hear enough or say enough about him. People began to call them "Christ-ians." Christ was their model, their message. They preached "Jesus Christ and him crucified," not for the lack of another topic, but because they couldn't exhaust this one.

What unlocked the doors of the apostles' hearts?

Simple. They saw Jesus. They encountered the Christ. Their sins collided with their Savior and their Savior won! What lit the boiler of the apostles was a red-hot conviction that the very one who should have sent them to hell, went to hell for them and came back to tell about it.

From *Six Hours One Friday* Copyright (W Publishing Group, 1989) Max Lucado

I was talking about this bible reading with a friend earlier this week and she said "I totally get these disciples". That's how I used to feel – "I was a prisoner to my thoughts and feelings. I never felt good enough, worried constantly about what everyone else thought, was always looking for affirmations and acceptance. So much so that I cut myself off from everyone rather than risk disappointing them or risk my being hurt by them. It was like being in a cocoon, trapped - nowhere to go - until God busted me out of the cocoon and I am free to fly like a butterfly."

The difference in her life? An encounter with Jesus. She discovering the love and the peace that Jesus offers and it freed her from her fears. She is now experiencing the abundant life God desires for each of us.

In so many ways, we are not a whole lot different from those first disciples. We are fearful creatures and need to be reminded of the risen Christ in our midst, need to be reminded of the peace that only God can give so that we can experience the abundant life God desires for us.

Rev. Dr. David Lose wrote in his blog this week:

"the reason we gather each week together isn't to make God happy (though I'm sure it does) or to learn sound morals (though perhaps

that happens) or even to learn the essentials of the Christian faith (that it would be nice if that happens from time to time, too). Rather, we gather so that we might encounter – or, better, be encountered by – the Risen Christ one more time and be caught up in faith so that we may experience God’s abundant life.

We come together... because the life of faith can be joyous and wonderful and all that, but it can also – and frequently is – rather challenging. The loss of a loved one, or end of a relationship, or the inability to find a job or get into the school of one’s choice, or the persistent ache of loneliness, or a prolonged bout of illness, or a pervasive sense of anxiety about our larger community, country, or world – all these things wear at you. At these times, faith can be a great strength and support, or faith can be a casualty of these assaults. **And so we come together to hear the stories of Jesus read and interpreted so that we might hear Jesus speaking to us and, in turn, we might leave renewed in faith, hope, and confidence.**

We come together, so that Jesus might encounter us and, through this encounter, change us into the people God wants us to be. That change won’t happen overnight. But thank heavens there’s another Sunday just seven days away!

(David Lose, In the Meantime <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/04/easter-2-a-thomas-john-and-the-reason-we-gather/>)

When we can come back together once again to be renewed in faith, hope and confidence.

May the peace of Christ be with you all. Amen