

April 27, 2025

St. John 20:19-21:

The Peace That Enters Through Locked Doors

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Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 N. Oakland Avenue
Decatur Illinois 62526

St, John 20:19-21

Dear Friends in Christ,

As I thought about the Gospel lesson for this Sunday my thoughts were drawn to the account of a missionary from Great Britain, Eric Barker, who spent over fifty years in Portugal preaching the Gospel, and often under very difficult circumstances during World War II. In fact the situation became so difficult that, under advice, he sent his wife and eight children along with his sister and her three children to England for safety. Barker remained behind to finish mission issues. The account stated:

The Sunday after Barker's loved ones had left, he stood before the congregation and said, "I've just received word that all my family have arrived safely home." He then proceeded with the service as usual. It was not until some time later that the full meaning of his words became known to his people. Just before the service he had been handed a wire that a submarine had torpedoed the ship, and everyone on board had drowned.

That hits the heart, doesn't it?" He was hit with tremendous grief, but instead of locking himself away in sadness, knowing that the members of his family were enjoying the bliss of heaven he found peace. . .

THE PEACE THAT ENTERS THROUGH LOCKED DOORS

I. Fears

"On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews... (v.19a)." There they were, ten of the remaining disciples. Thomas hadn't arrived. Judas, the betrayer, committed suicide. Their leader died a criminal's death on the Cross. Were they next? Fears!

And then, the guilt, the shame. They had vowed to a man to stand with Jesus to the death. Do you remember Peter? How could we ever forget? We're so much like him: "Even though they all fall away, I will not...if I must die with you, I will not deny you. (Mk.14:29,31a)." The words scream at us: "Don't ever say never!" And what about the other disciples? We're told: "And all the others said the same thing (Mk.14:31)."

Fear...guilt...shame. They have a way of doing that, don't they? Locking doors. Out. Wanting to hide. And then the pleading: "Lord, get me out of this!" Have you ever been there? A man by the name of Hobart Mower wrote, "There is no such thing as pseudo-guilt. You don't feel guilty because of what happened to you...but because of something you did, an attitude you took."

And then it sets in: the paralysis. The locking away because of guilt...shame...the fear of consequences. And that begins to restructure our spiritual life - our walk with the Lord. It happens, doesn't it? A little less time in prayer. A little less time in the Word. A little less time in worship and fellowship with brothers and sisters. Excuses. And so, the doors lock - one by one. The windows are shut. Turn out the lights. Crawl into the bed of ignoring and pull the blanket of "I don't want to think about it!" over the head of reality. "Lord, I'm hurting, I'm afraid! What's next?"

II. Doubts

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe (vss.24,25)."

Doubts. We all have them. But there's another word to consider: Unless. "Unless I see... and place my finger...and place my hand...," says Thomas. Sound familiar. "Unless God does this or that, I will or won't!"...what!? Have you been there, wheeling and dealing with God? Former Lutheran seminary professor, Donald L. Deffner, wrote . . .

But you and I can't make deals with God. Our relationship with him is to be unconditional...

This is not a "think positive and you will get ahead in your business or marriage" kind of thinking. Rather this is Jesus asking us to notice people in his ministry who saw the release of Christ's power: the Roman Centurion, the demon possessed man, the woman with hemorrhage, the paralyzed man, and many more. He said, "Your sins are forgiven...your faith has saved you!"

So I challenge you in your own personal life. God is a God who doesn't make deals. He will escape you forever, until you see him revealed in Jesus his Son.

You might think this is silly but I ask you, seriously, do you truly believe Jesus lived a sinless life for you then died a horrid death on a Roman Cross to pay for every one of your sins, was resurrected, then promised eternal life to those who believe, and promised to be with you now and forever? Do you? Deffner also wrote, "That faith brings us into a relationship with him that lasts forever."

You see, it isn't a matter of "doubts," or "unless". It's a matter of understanding what we've known all along: God knows what's best! And, by the way, I hope you caught these words from our text: "Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them... (v.26)." The doors were locked...once again! Fear and doubts are hard to remove. So, will the real "doubting Thomas" please stand!

Oh yes, and one more point here: "Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God (vv.27-28).'" Thomas didn't touch Him!

III. Unlocking Fears and Doubts

Well let's face it, most, if not all of us, have a place we like to enter and then securely lock the door behind us. There are those times when a person doesn't want to face reality.

Let's go back to that first moment when Jesus entered through locked doors. We're told, "Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When he had said this, he showed his them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." Then, Jesus said to them again, '...Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you (vv.19-21).'" It was eight days later when Thomas was with them and again we're told, "...Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you (v.26).'"

Three times Jesus called for peace to be with them. What peace? Well, it's not peace with this world or just a "feel good" moment. It's the peace for those who betrayed Him, denied Him, turned against Him, one who cursed and swore he did not know Jesus. It's peace for those who sinned against him. Us! It's the peace to be forgiven and loved by God in our constant struggle with sin. As the Apostle John wrote: "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and gave his Son to be the propitiation for our sin (1 Jn.4:10)." Propitiation is defined as "the act of appeasing or turning away God's wrath through a sacrifice, specifically Jesus Christ's death, which satisfies God's justice and allows for the forgiveness of sins."

Luther wrote . . .

It's very difficult for a man to believe that God is gracious to him. The human heart cannot grasp this. What happened in my case? I was once terrified by the sacrament (the Lord's Supper...Afterward I made confession to Dr. Staupitz, and he said to me, "Your thought is not of Christ." With this word he comforted me well. This is the way we are. Christ offers Himself to us together with the forgiveness of sins, and yet we flee from His face...(God) gave us Christ with all his gifts, and yet we flee from him and regard him as our judge.

IV. Blessed

Luther's words hit: "...yet we flee from him and regard him as our judge." Have you ever asked yourself, "Will God go on forgiving me in my battle with sin? Will He go on forgiving me for the same sins that flow from mind to mouth to action?" Over and over again the Lord Jesus Christ stands in front of us and says, "Put your finger here, and see my hands and put your hand and place it in my side." And then the admonition: "Do not disbelieve but believe (v.27b)." He promises, "Whoever believes has eternal life."

Okay, He doesn't stand in front of us physically, but He is in front of us in what we call the Means of Grace, the written and spoken Word and the visible Word of Baptism and His Supper. Look, He said to the disciples, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed (v.29)." We are truly blessed, blessed with the greatest miracle of faith in Christ! Word and Sacraments are the Means God uses to reach out and draw us to Christ's death and resurrection where we are assured that all sins and doubts are forgiven.

Luther also said, "The true pilgrimage is not to Rome...but to the Prophets, the Psalms, and the Gospels." All this is the Word. Dear friends, we cannot ignore the Lord's words to Thomas because they are about you and me; again, "Blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed." That's us! Or, as the Christian woman who was asked about her great faith replied, "I am not a woman with the great faith, but I am a woman of little faith in the great God."

It is the peace of God in Christ that enters through our locked doors, opens the windows and shines forth in our dark moments, pulls back the blanket that covers reality and says to each of us . . .

PEACE BE WITH YOU. TRULY!

Pastor Bill Abbott