

What Do You Do When You're Locked in a Room?

John 20:19-31 (Easter 2 - April 19, 2020)

On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you! Just as the Father has sent me, I am also sending you." After saying this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whenever you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." But Thomas, one of the Twelve, the one called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples kept telling him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe." After eight days, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you," he said. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, did many other miraculous signs that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

I'm sure the disciples figured that life was going to go on just as it had been. On Thursday, they gathered in that upper room and the way Jesus spoke like things weren't going to be as they had been. Jesus spoke very clearly about his betrayal. He said the bread and wine at the table were his body and blood. He talked like he was leaving them. But did any one of them really think that after leaving the upper room that night their "after Passover plans" would really change? Even going to Gethsemane wasn't unusual. Yet all of a sudden when Jesus was arrested, tried, condemned, crucified, and died, things changed. Their lives changed and fear led them to spend their Sunday evening in a room behind locked doors.

A few months ago we would have thought that life was going to carry on just as it was. We made plans for life that involved being able to move about, go places, and do things. Students were going to go to school. Families talked about day trips to places like the zoo. Weekends away or vacations to places like Disneyland were set on the calendar. Friends and families were going to get together as they always have. Churches, families, and communities planned Easter gatherings and activities like they always do. But then all of a sudden things changed. Instead of being able to go places and do things, we can't because they are shut down and we are being encouraged to separate and stay safer at home.

We may not be locking ourselves in homes out of fear, but in a society that is mobile and has the freedom to usually go where they want living their life, it certainly can feel like we are locked in a room. That "locked away feeling" causes us to focus only on the situation at hand wondering with a fearful heart what exactly the future holds. So this morning we focus around this question: What do we do when things have changed and we feel like we are locked in a room?

In that locked room on that first Easter evening it's not hard to figure out what was going through the disciples' minds. Sorrow, shock, fear, cautious hope hearing the women's news that morning, and even disbelief had infiltrated these disciples. Sorrow because their Lord and close friend Jesus had died. The shock of all that had happened must have left them confused. Yet there was maybe a sense of cautious hope as they heard the women's news that morning that they had seen Jesus. Although they hadn't seen him yet for

themselves, at least one would be very vocal about his disbelief. Yet it was mainly because of fear that these men locked themselves in that room.

John tells us exactly what they were afraid of - the Jews. Why were they so afraid? Were they going to be brought up on charges of grave robbery? The rumor had begun to be spread from the soldiers who guarded Jesus' tomb that the disciples had stolen his body. Were they afraid that they were next on the Jewish leaders agenda? If they found a reason to condemn Jesus to death then the disciples could be considered guilty by association. We aren't told exactly why they were afraid of the Jews, but focusing on the situation at hand, they locked themselves away out of fear. In their fear, that's when the Risen Jesus came to them so that they would see he really had risen from the dead. His coming would remove their fears and give them peace.

Even though the door was barred shut, there was Jesus in the flesh standing among them. In his glorified state, the laws of nature no longer bound him to walking in a door. The door was locked and yet there was Jesus alive speaking to them. "Peace be with you!" They heard his familiar voice. He showed them his wounds confirming that the man who had just appeared among them was indeed the Risen Jesus. They may have been locked in that room, but the situation in that locked room changed. It was no longer a room filled with somber sorrow and fear. It was a place where joyful celebration began at Jesus' very presence, but the words Jesus spoke communicated so much more than just a simple greeting to delight the fearful.

"Shalom, peace", was a traditional greeting among friends in that culture. In fact it still is used in that part of the world. To say "peace" was kind of like saying "hello", but when Jesus said it what did that word really communicate to them as Jesus showed these fearful disciples the nail marks in his hands and the spear mark in his side? When he spoke of peace and showed them his wounds, it communicated a peace that went beyond "hello". It was a peace that is the most important peace a fearful sinner can possess. They may not have understood completely at that point, but they would. Jesus talked about the peace he gives just a few nights before. He said, **"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let it be afraid."** (John 14:27) With this greeting and showing his wounds, he shows them peace is theirs through those wounds as he stands there alive and victorious over sin and death.

That peace comes from knowing that in him who was crucified and rose from the dead we have forgiveness of sins. We are at peace with God all through the work of Christ. A sinner's guilty conscience can be at peace knowing that he has been declared not guilty of every sin. It is a peace that gives us a living hope that cannot be taken away. Peter who was there and saw the wounds and heard him speak that night wrote many years later to Christians who were undergoing their own fearful trials and hardships, **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you."** (1 Peter 1:3-4)

Instead of focusing on the situation in front of us feeling like we are locked in a room when we, focus on the Risen Jesus, the peace he gives fills our hearts leading us to rejoice even in times of uncertainty. Rejoicing is indeed what the disciples did when they saw Jesus behind those locked doors. All of sudden the situation seemed to be of no real concern for them anymore. However, there was one who wasn't there in the locked room that night, one who had yet to see Jesus. Instead of peace filling his heart doubts and skepticism seemed to block his view as the others told him the joyous news. There's a reason we affectionately call him "Doubting Thomas".

If it was possible for anyone's reaction to kill the excitement in that room, it would have been Thomas' reaction. Thomas demanded specific terms to be met otherwise he would never ever believe that Jesus had risen. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger into the marks of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe." You can imagine the disappointment and the frustrating conversations the other ten disciples were having with him all week long. If the phrase had been coined at that time, you could just hear them say something like, "Stop being a Doubting Thomas." Yet isn't Thomas an example of just how stubborn the heart of a sinner can be? All the evidence could be in and every testimony be declared, but it is the nature of a sinner to doubt, to not believe, to be skeptical of even the best news when held up against reason and the facts of a situation.

Yet look at the grace of Jesus in gently and lovingly dealing with Thomas. When Jesus comes again the following Sunday with peace on his lips, he responds to Thomas. It was an act of pure grace meeting every one of Thomas' demands. He didn't have to do any of that. He could have let Thomas remain in his doubting, unbelieving state. Instead out of such love for this one man he comes proclaiming peace and turns to speak directly to Thomas. You can just hear the gentleness in his voice. "Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe." As much as Thomas had demanded, all he needed in order to believe Jesus had risen from the dead was to simply see Jesus and those wounds. All doubts, skepticism, and unbelief melted away leaving unquestioning faith in his heart and praise on his lips, "My Lord and my God!"

Hebrews 11 defines faith as being certain of what we do not see. Our certainty comes purely by what we do not see with our eyes. Jesus said of you and I, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." But are you always so certain of what you do not see? Let's face it Jesus isn't standing right here in front of us to continually remind us of his peace and show us his wounds. What our eyes see all too often is the challenging times we are in feeling locked in a room. Yes we know Jesus rose from the dead. Yes we know we are forgiven and that we will be in his glorious heaven one day, but we are so often tempted to think like Thomas filled with doubts, skepticism, and a lack of faith in the Risen Jesus because of what our eyes do not see. But just as Jesus dealt with Thomas in his grace, so Jesus continually comes to us in his grace through the pages of his Word to enhance our sight of faith and drive away our doubts. In a statement that summarizes his entire Gospel, John writes about the sight God's Word gives to the doubting skeptic inside all of us and even those who have yet to see Jesus. **(read vs. 30-31)**

What do you do when it seems everything has changed and you feel like you are locked in a room? As you spend this time isolated from activities you would like to do and the people that you would like to visit feeling like you are locked in a room, don't let the situation which has so changed our lives or doubts that might be creeping into your heart take your eyes off of the Risen Jesus. Instead keep seeing Jesus through his Word. My friends, a locked door could not keep Jesus from coming to his disciples. Time and space cannot keep Jesus from coming to us through his Word. Hear him greet you with his peace. See his wounds. Only then will our hearts that so often begin to doubt his promises be continually made more confident in what our eyes do not see yet. Only then is your sight of faith kept focused on Jesus risen and victorious over sin and death for each of us and we are at peace. My friends, raise the praises of our Savior boldly declaring, "My Lord and my God!" Amen