

John 20: 19-31 THOMAS

April 15, 2012

"Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said 'peace be with you'"

There is no closed door that can keep the Risen Christ out.

No barring, no key, no slamming, no barrier that is stronger than the Resurrection Life that is the gift of God in Christ Jesus.

There is no closed door that can keep him out.

Christ appears....unbidden, unexpected, total graceful surprise
when we least expect him
when we have locked the doors in fear
and when the bolts are as secure as they can be.
Suddenly, Christ is there
saying

"Peace – peace be with you".

This, perhaps, is the Easter message we most need to hear
and before which the closed things of the world lose all significance.
There is no closed door that can keep out the Risen Christ.
No fear that God cannot break through
No feeble scheme of self-protection, individual or ecclesiastical or political
that can ultimately stand before the power and love of the One whose message is peace.

In the end, that message of Peace is the one that will endure...whose voice will be strong
long after the clanging of the doors and the echoes of the slamming shut
have faded into nothingness

the voice of the One bringing peace will be clear and strong.

This message is first of forgiveness
then of empowerment
and finally of commissioning.

First forgiveness
second empowerment
and finally
commissioning.

This is the first time since his crucifixion that any of them except Mary has seen him.
And even though Mary told them she had seen Jesus

their own last memory of him was of the scene in the garden – the arrest, the trial and of their own fear that led them to flee; to remove themselves from the horror of what was happening. They had betrayed their teacher – their friend.

Their guilt must have been overwhelming.

Was THAT what closed the door?

Their betrayal must have felt like a closed door, keeping them from believing Mary, believing that it could be true.

And so the first experience of Jesus, there with them in spite of the closed door
it was for them first and foremost an experience of forgiveness.

The One they had betrayed stood before them,
and his words were of peace.

Peace be with you he said.

They would have immediately remembered what he said to them the last time they were together:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled; and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say I am going away and I am coming to you....” and he goes on.

Here he is, saying it again, after all that had happened. At that last meal together he told them that what he wanted most for them was that they should love one another. And that they should truly be one.

“That all may be one” - where do we use that prayer here in the UCC? It is the expression on our United Church Crest – at the very bottom of the crest, Jesus' prayer in Latin: *“ut omnes unum sint”* that all may be one.

He prayed that they would stick together; he prayed that we would be one.
And he said he left them his peace.

And now -

now he was here among them again
after they had closed the door on his final wish for them
mere hours after he had prayed that they would be one
they scattered

leaving not only him but one another
terrified, denying they even knew him
because that's what fear does

fear separates. Separates us from one another, from our own best selves, from clarity of thought and feeling
and from God.

Fear did it for them, hours after they had said “surely not I” they took off. Abandoned him, and each other.

and here Jesus is, doing what God always does, breaking through the fear, breaking through that door and saying what? “Peace be with you”.

Forgiveness like that is a call, you know.
Forgiveness like that can't just stay put inside you.
If Jesus forgave them so freely, so lovingly, so completely
then how could they possibly hold things against one another?

When Jesus forgives you, that forgiveness is a call to live life forgiven and forgiving
life lived in the freedom and openness and peace of what it is to be forgiven.
He had said to them before he died

“Love one another as I have loved you” -

And NOW they knew what that meant.
Now it made sense.
Did they realize exactly what it would require of them? Maybe not yet – but the door was open to an
understanding.
They were forgiven, and here was their friend, blessing them with peace.

That HAS to have consequences.

Then....then he breathed on them. (verse 22)
This is John's Pentecost. Luke reports it 50 days later, but for John, it happened Easter night. There, in
the room with the locked door.

Repeat verse 22

His Resurrection appearance is first, an experience of forgiveness, then of empowerment. They are sent
by Christ as Christ was sent by God, John says. THAT is a tall order. How are they going to do that??

By the power of the Spirit, that's how.
The Spirit of God who breathes on them
as on the first day of creation
as the Spirit of God was breathed into the bones in Ezekiel's vision.

They do not live; they do not act alone. God's spirit breathed into them and THAT is why they can unlock
the doors and learn to forgive one another.
That is why they can turn from frightened, self-centred people into a force that turned the world upside
down.

THESE are the people who became the body of Christ, and because of them we are here today to pass
on this mighty heritage – this pearl of great price – the Gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

It's because of them. These fearful ones, cowering behind a closed door
were filled with the Spirit of God and became a force that shook the whole world with the good news of
Jesus.

Wherever doors are shut to that good news....
whenever we are afraid to put our hands into the wounds of the world and so we slam the door, draw
the drapes, turn off the news to avoid touching those wounds...

whenever fear reigns and closes the door

The risen Christ appears
and says *Peace*.

Peace be with you.

As God has sent me, so I send you.

You know about closed doors. You know about times when it feels as though a door has been slammed in your face.

And you know about times when you are the one who does the closing.

There is no closed door that can keep out the power of God.

Not the closed door of the disciples' read

not the closed door of Thomas' doubt

not even the final door – the powerful closed door of death itself.

Even that could not keep out the power of God.

Mary and I are meeting to prepare for her confirmation and we've started reading the book of Revelation together. In chapter One there's a great line: The Risen Christ is speaking to the author....who has just seen a vision of the Holy One. Here's what he says:

“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me saying 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever, and I have the keys of Death and Hell’.

Isn't this great? Someone paralyzed by fear....and God does what God DOES and says...what?

Don't be afraid.

Someone feeling lost and locked in some hell-like pit and God says

You feel locked up in some hell? I HAVE THE KEYS. Nothing trumps that. God has the keys.

In the fact of the terrible spectre of the closed door of death, the Risen Christ says *“Don't be afraid – I have the keys”*

and bursts the gates of death with Resurrection life.

The movement of Resurrection is always – always – away from what confines
and toward openness and freedom.

That power lives here and now

and calls us....sends us

empowered by the very breath of God

to be agents of Resurrection life.

When you go from here to let that life live in you, and reach out through you to others: where you live,
where you work, and through the M&S fund, to the world

and when it seems as though the doors are closed

remember this Resurrection story.

There is no door that can ultimately keep out the Risen Christ. Let God fill you with that breath of life
and send you out to open closed doors so that the Name of Jesus can be openly proclaimed and glorified
everywhere.

Amen.