

## *Why Are the Doors Locked?*

E-2B

1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

April 19, 2009

*More signs of the presence of the risen Lord in our midst: honest confession, assurance of God's forgiveness, and lives where sin's power is being overcome.*

<sup>NRS</sup> **1 John 1:1** We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life -- <sup>2</sup> this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us -- <sup>3</sup> we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> We are writing these things so that our<sup>1</sup> joy may be complete. <sup>5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; <sup>7</sup> but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

**2:1** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; <sup>2</sup> and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

*To help Thomas believe, Jesus showed him his real scars and invited him to touch them.*

<sup>NRS</sup> **John 20:19** When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "**Peace be with you.**" <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "**Peace be with you.** As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "**Receive the Holy Spirit.**" <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." <sup>24</sup> But **Thomas** (who was called the Twin<sup>1</sup>), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." <sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them

and said, "**Peace be with you.**" <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "**My Lord and my God!**" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may come to believe<sup>1</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah,<sup>2</sup> the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

The Easter Story in the Gospel of John today picks up only hours from its startling early dawn revelations. In Jewish calculations, this was still the day that had begun the evening before. It was the first day of the week, though nearly ended. What were not ended were the questions that lingered in the minds and hearts of the disciples. These disciples were still literally locked behind doors on this wondrous day. Why were they locked into this room behind bolted doors? Why are the doors locked?

The answer is oddly simple and straightforward. One word says it all, "**fear.**" "*...the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews...*" (John 20:19b) This is not a fear of Jewish people. It never should be said that we then or now simply fear "the Jews." It is the force of authority and the depth of sin in all our hearts that is the source. Fear is a powerful

wepon, a **state of being** that should not be discounted as a mere emotional reaction to a danger. It has the power to isolate and immobilize. In the older use of the word in the Bible, it meant more than something of raw paralyzing fear. It suggested a respect and reverence of what was holy. Fear in this ancient sense would be more like the word, “*awe*.” This implied a point of relationship with God, as the book of Proverbs suggests, “*The **fear** of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*” (Proverbs 9:10)

In this first day of revelation of the Risen Lord, the primary word used is “fear.” It is not this ancient awe of the divine. Interesting! These disciples were close to Jesus. They had seen and heard him for three years. They were not afraid of Jesus. Many others also had been able to testify to this man, Jesus, as an extraordinary person of faith at the very least. He had told them on several occasions that he had expected this reaction and this execution. He had encouraged them **not to be afraid** in his last hours in the Upper Room.

<sup>27</sup> *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. **Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*** (John 14:27)

This is the word that the **angels declared** to the frightened shepherds at the scene of the great announcement of the birth of Jesus; and it is a word that is **spoken after his resurrection.** It is the word of calming assurance and hope that everyone needs to hear. It is a holy peace. And, in hearing, seeing and experiencing God's holy presence, there is a **peace that surpasses our understanding.** This is a peace that frees us from the locked doors of soul, when fear strikes and attempts for paralyze us, sucking out the very essence of a vital life.

Jesus announces to **Thomas**, who was doubtful, that he could touch him, if he desired. He did not, because he received the breath of life in the risen Christ. This holy breath released a freedom from fear that gave him life, which is the product of believing in our risen Lord. What issues from their soul is **joy and praise.** Life is worth the living because death is not holding them in fear. Threats

and attacks can no longer entomb them; and the news that God is still at work in us, as it was in the disciples, and for this world gives us **power to live alive in faith.**

Do not be deceived. Fear is powerful; perhaps it is the gripping force that makes our sin the more dangerous. What locks and bolts the doors for the disciples is human and universal. What binds the force of life in shackles behind locked doors for the disciples is still at work today.

**What is this fear?** What are you and I afraid of expressing or witnessing to in our life today? I grew up in an environment where **alcoholism** locked me behind unseen doors of shame. Because it was never an issue on the table, it was all the more powerful to keep us in an emotional prison. I learned to keep my emotions corralled, enclosed in a safe and unseen place. Both joy and pain have always been difficult for me to express. When these fears are not acknowledged, it is **hard** to let the power of life in Christ to give me the gift of freedom.

Fear can be a force that is within the depths of my soul. It is where I hide and keep my secret life secret as much as possible, hidden; I delude myself, even from God. We do not want to be known or found out, do we? What would happen if we were found out for what and who we really are, what terrible thing would happen to us? **I am a doubting Thomas** at times. Are you? Can we question what we don't understand without fear that God will punish us or that another person will think less of us?

I have often encountered times in a group, when I seemed to be the only one who was apparently ignorant. I did not want to reveal my perception of foolishness or stupidity. So, I kept my fears inside me and went on about my life pretending that I understood or had full faith. I didn't, of course, have much faith.

I have met many people in many churches who had major questions about human doctrines concerning the divine and human sides of our Lord. But, fear locked their questions inside false perceptions of faith. What results, then, ends up being a kind of **"faking it."** Belief that is really faking it is more dangerous than

faith that lives with questions and doubts. Hidden and unacknowledged fear of this nature prevents us from encountering God and allowing new insights, new experiences, new ideas, new vistas of service and **new anything** that God wants to do. Fear **fortifies** the *seven last words* of the church, “***We have never done it that way before.***” Fear of change locks us into being forever the “***frozen chosen.***” Do you know what I mean? Is it safer or is faith stronger, when we pretend faith, when we hide emotion and joy and feelings of love and being loved?

These are times when we need to confess our sin in order to find the forgiving and freeing power of being a Christian in a new day. The result of opening our lives in a more honest and risking way is to **hear the Good News** of Christ even when locked behind doors of fear. Jesus said it several times; almost as if it was not being heard or that it was too unbelievable to be real. He said, “***Peace be with you.***” Each time Jesus appeared to them, he said the words again, “***Peace be with you.*** Finally, Thomas did not need to stick his finger in the wounds. He just took in the marvelous

freeing and regenerating words of his Savior. His only response was “***My Lord and my God.***”

There is much to cause us fear in this world today. It may be totally different for each of us in this room. But, each of us all the same needs to hear the words of hope to restore us and give us life to **live alive in faith**, God’s gift in our darkest moments. We all need light to shine in our darkness, especially in times when we are at each other’s throats. These are times in this world when bigotry and fear of class and race are putting barriers of distrust between us. Do we want to break out of this fear? Perhaps not! What if God gave us that sacred breath of the Holy Spirit to jump the barriers of fear? What would that mean to us? How would life be different if God’s  **blessing of peace** to us were to become a **reality**? We too often are locked behind doors of age, change, emotions, colors, gender, race, ethnicity and who knows what else in the power of evil that separates us could do this? Fear is **not** just being locked behind external, outside, bolted doors but the force within our

hearts to **resist God's command** in the risen Christ to receive the **divine gift of PEACE**.

Today is a new day. It is an Easter day. Every Sunday is Easter to rejoice in the power of God to raise us up to new life and to reveal the compassion, mercy, and love of God to a broken world. Can we hear the song?

*God sent His son, they called Him Jesus*

*He came to love, heal, and forgive.*

*He lived and died to buy my pardon,*

*An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives.*

*Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.*

*Because He lives, **All fear is gone**.*

*Because I know He holds the future,*

*And life is worth the living just because He lives.*

Come on out from behind this door of fear. Do not let it bind us. Dear Lord, take off **funeral cloths**. Free us from this tomb of anxiety. Raise us up to rejoice that we may feel and believe that the

last word is not death, nor threats or fears or hurts or pains or insults or strange new ways, that **we are free** from the powers that make us like *criminals in hiding*. Can we move from cowering to a testimony of conquering when, by God's grace, we break out from behind these bolted doors of fear? Let's **sing** this first verse of *Because He Lives*. Do the refrain twice, once with accompaniment, then finally without accompaniment.

This is God's gift in this Easter of our lives, "*Peace be with you.*" I invite you to **believe** in the one who alone can give the world this peace and drive away the darkness from the depths of our soul. Amen.