

**A Sermon from the Episcopal Parish of
St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, Massachusetts
Preached by the Rev. Timothy E. Schenck on April 19, 2020 (Easter 2A)**

The doors of the house where the disciples met were locked. They bolted the doors and pulled down the shades and turned off all the lights. They hid themselves away because they were terrified, fearful for their own lives and traumatized by the day's events.

It's still Easter Day, by the way. At least according to this morning's gospel passage that begins, "When it was evening on that day..." And what took place early in the morning *on that day*, was the resurrection itself. At daybreak, Jesus appeared to the women at the tomb, and charged Mary Magdalene with sharing this remarkable news that he was alive with the other disciples. The *male* disciples, who had all run away and locked themselves away.

Now, I think we can all relate to days blurring together and the whole notion of losing track of time. Over the past month, time itself seems to be standing still, and many of the familiar markers of our days and weeks have seemingly evaporated overnight. Some of us — and I'm not naming names for fear of self-incrimination — have even resorted to using those nursing home-style white boards to keep us on track: "Today is Sunday." So we can probably relate to the disciples and their experience of the longest day ever.

But they had gathered together and locked themselves away. Guilt by association, they assumed. The one they followed, this Jesus, was killed for his blasphemy, his revolutionary ideas, his challenge to the status quo. It figured that those who were his known associates would be next. Despite their denials, there were just too many witnesses. They would surely be rooted out and accused of being his most ardent followers. And so they gathered together and locked the doors on that very long and confusing first Easter Day.

One typically human response to fear is to hide. It's the "flight" part of the fight or flight response. To run away, to hide, to seek cover. And you can't blame them. We would have probably all done the exact same thing. But even after the "unconfirmed" reports that Jesus was alive, the disciples remain hidden. Confused, fearful, doubtful.

Mary Magdalene comes with life-changing, life-affirming news about the resurrection and the disciples' response is to remain behind locked doors. She shares the news that would change everything, and the disciples burrow down even deeper. They batten down the hatches. That's what fear does, after all. It causes us to look inward, to focus on self-interest and self-preservation. This manifests itself in some bizarre ways like the impulse to hoard toilet paper.

But it's hard not to think about the disciples being locked away without reflecting on our own situation these days. The fear and anxiety that we lock away with us inside our homes. If you live with others, you know that the stress gets to everybody at some point. At our house, we tend to take turns, which is better than the alternative of everyone freaking out at the same time. I think.

But you can imagine the disciples all in the same room. Huddled together in the days following Jesus' crucifixion, under their own self-imposed stay-at-home order. Some nervously pacing, some peeking out the windows, some just sitting and staring blankly into space, some arguing about petty things. We all respond to fear in different ways, and the disciples were no different.

And it's easy to turn inward and ignore the problems of the wider world since we're all dealing with our own stuff, sometimes just trying to make it through the day. Sometimes just trying to figure out what's for dinner. But eventually we have to look beyond ourselves. We have to unlock the doors and venture forth. Not literally in this case, or not without a mask, but emotionally and spiritually. To leave the safe confines of our homes and start reaching out to others in meaningful ways.

As I sat with this passage in my post-Easter haze, I was taken with a small detail I hadn't really noticed before. Of course, at the beginning we hear that the doors were locked. It's important to note that fact not just because it highlights the disciples' fear, but more importantly because it makes Jesus' sudden appearance that much more miraculous. The doors are locked and yet the resurrected Jesus comes and stands among them. The locked doors emphasize the fact that something dramatic has taken place.

But a week later, when they're in the same house and Thomas had finally shown up, we hear that the doors are shut — but not locked. That's an important detail. The fear is starting to lift. Not entirely, not completely, but there's movement. In the coming days, Jesus appears to various disciples as they fish and walk and break bread together. Gradually, the locked doors are unlocked. Gradually, the unlocked doors are opened. Gradually, the open doors are walked through. So it is with our hearts, as we let Jesus in and allow him to accompany us on our journey of life. When we let go of the fear that restricts our compassion and generosity and love.

But in order to get to that point, we have to leave room for Jesus to suddenly appear among us. The resurrected Jesus can cut through our fears and isolation and anxiety just as easily as he can show up in a locked room.

Let Jesus break into the disruption, let Jesus intrude into your life, let Jesus show up as an unexpected guest, let Jesus break the locks of disbelief and enter your heart. These post-resurrection appearances are powerful reminders that Jesus won't let anything stand in his way to reach us. Not our doubts, not our fears, not locked doors, not even death itself can separate us from the love of God.

Let Jesus in. And take to heart his very first words to the disciples: "Peace be with you."