

Behind Closed Doors  
John 20:19-23  
May 5, 2019

Last Sunday, we talked about Thomas, who is commonly known as “Doubting Thomas. We talked about his unwillingness to blindly accept the story of Jesus’ resurrection. When he was told that Jesus was risen from the dead, he said “Unless I see the risen Christ myself and touch his wounds, I will not believe it.” Of course, this happened before he met the risen Christ. However, after encountering the risen Christ he no longer doubted Jesus’ resurrection. In fact, he made one of the greatest confessions of faith. He called Jesus, “My Lord, my God.” When you read the story carefully you realize that instead of Thomas being doubtful, he was careful.

We also talked about two different kinds of doubts: intellectual doubts and circumstantial doubts. Then I mentioned that doubts can be used to deepen our faith instead of strangling it.

Today, we will continue to explore the resurrection story, particularly what happened on the first Easter. We will focus on the following:

- What was going on in the disciples’ minds *before* they met the risen Christ?
- Based on the Scripture, what was the meaning of Jesus’ greeting and his message of forgiveness?
- And what do all of these mean for us?

First of all, when Jesus was arrested the disciples were frightened, and they all ran away abandoning him. When they witnessed what happened to Jesus, the disciples were terrified. We can read that in our passage. It begins with these words, “On the evening of the first day of the week (which was the day of resurrection), when the disciples were together, the doors were locked for fear of the Jews.”<sup>1</sup> They gathered together in one place and they locked the door, because they were afraid.

Have you ever been afraid? I am sure you have. All of us are afraid of something. You know the word “phobia.” It is an anxiety disorder. It is an exaggerated fear of something, severe dislike, or extreme aversion to something. We have many “phobia-words” to describe what we are afraid of. For example, acrophobia (fear of height), aerophobia (fear of flying), autophobia (fear of being

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<sup>1</sup> John 20:19.

alone), hemophobia (fear of blood), hydrophobia (fear of water), zoophobia (fear of animal), etc. Do you know how many of these phobia-words we have? We have well over 500 of them.<sup>2</sup> In other words, we are afraid of a lot of things.

In life, it's almost impossible to be totally free from fear and anxiety. We will face something that will frighten us, whether that is terrorism, accidents, natural disasters, terminal illness, or whatever. We will face something that will scare us, and if we are gripped by fear we cannot be in peace.

The disciples were in that situation. They could not walk around freely because they might be caught and persecuted as the followers of Jesus. They were afraid that the Jews might come with the Roman soldiers to take them away.

So, they locked the doors. They were isolating themselves. They were immobilized. Fear has a way of doing that. Fear makes us immobile, impotent, and isolated.

However, fear is not the only thing that makes us immobile, impotent and isolated. Extreme disappointment or discouragement does that, too.

Disappointment comes when we feel we didn't get what we wanted, or when we realize we will never achieve what we wanted. It has a connotation of finality. When people lose hope, they lose the ability to dream for the future. Despair replaces joy. Discouragement replaces optimism. Fear replaces faith. Anxiety replaces prayer. Insecurity replaces confidence. What was once a dream is now replaced by nightmares. That is how the disciples felt.

“The doors were locked for fear of the Jews.” Even though there had been reports that Jesus had been resurrected, they were not sure if that was true or if they could believe it. They were not sure what that really meant.

Their hearts were filled with uncertainty, anxiety, insecurity, and fear. In that situation, in the midst of their fear and confusion, Jesus came and said, “Peace be with you.” Even though the doors were locked, he came and stood among them.

To me this is very significant. “Even though the doors were locked, he came and stood among them.” There isn't anything that could prevent the Lord's presence. He came to calm their hearts and to give them the assurance that he was the Lord of life and death. That is why he greeted them with peace. Once they

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<sup>2</sup> <https://myupscprelims.blogspot.com/2016/04/list-of-500-phobias.html>

knew that Jesus was the Lord of life and death, there was nothing they would be afraid of. So, Jesus greeted them with peace. Then the first thing he did was to show them his wounds. It was to tell them, "It is me. I know it is hard to believe, but it is really me. Look at the nail marks. Look at my side. And believe!"

When the disciples saw Jesus, I am sure the disciples had the mixed feelings. They were overjoyed, no doubt. At the same time, they must have felt ashamed about the fact that they all abandoned him. I am sure they were remorseful and embarrassed, but before they could say anything, Jesus said, "Peace be with you." I am sure there was a pause. Then I can almost see him saying, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

Then Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." Jesus is saying, "I understand what you feel. I understand you feel guilty and shameful, but I understand your weakness. I have chosen you knowing full well of your weakness and inadequacy, and I am sending you. You will be equipped by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Then he breathed on them and said, "Received the Holy Spirit." (As forgiven individuals, forgive each other, and those who sin against you.) "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

When Jesus had his last supper with the disciples, what did he say to his disciples? After washing their feet Jesus said to them, "I, your Lord and teacher have set you an example. Just the way I have washed your feet, you should wash one another's feet. Just the way I have served you, you should serve one another." Then he said, "Love one another as I have loved you." That is what he said. The final message Jesus gave his disciples before he was crucified was to serve and to love one another.

The first message he gave his disciples after he was risen from the dead was to forgive one another and to forgive those who sin against them. Loving someone enough to willingly serve him is hard, but it is impossible to do so without forgiving the person.

True forgiveness is not easy to do. That is why Jesus gave them the power of the Holy Spirit by breathing on them. We need the power of God and his help to be able to forgive those who sin against us.

What happens when you forgive someone? What happens is that you no longer hold the grudge against that person. When someone sins against you, even if you forgive the person, that does not guarantee to free the person from his own feelings of guilt and shame. The person has to deal with his own sins, guilt and shame. It is between him and the Lord. Whether you forgive the person or not, the person's sins, guilt and shame remain in him. That is something he has to deal with the Lord. However, when you forgive, you no longer hold a grudge against him.

So, what did Jesus mean when he said, "If you forgive anyone his sin, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven"? What it means is, if you forgive someone, you let go of your grudge against the person. You are freed. If you don't, his sin remains in your heart as a grudge against him.

An evangelist of the previous generation, Rodney Smith (1860-1947), better known as Gipsy Smith once talked about the cross of Jesus and said, "I am not afraid of the cross. I know that men used to come there to die, but since Jesus died, they come there to live."<sup>3</sup>

God's forgiveness is rooted in the grace of God. Forgiving another's sins and offenses is also rooted in the grace of God we have experienced.

When a man named Carl Coleman was driving to work, a car came over to his lane and hit his car. It was young woman who drove that car. Both cars stopped. The young woman looking at the damage was in tears. It was her fault, she admitted. Her car was brand-new, only the second day from the show room. She did not know how to face her husband. Coleman was sympathetic but he explained that they needed to exchange information. The woman reached into the glove compartment to get the documents. The documents were in an envelope. When she opened it, there was card in the front of the envelope. In bold letters, there was a message from her husband. She didn't know about it. It said, "In case of accident, remember, Honey, it is you I love, not the car."<sup>4</sup>

Those are God's words to us. It is "we" God loves. Because God has taken away our sins forever, we are to forgive other's sins as well. That is the way to move forward in our relationships and in our lives. That is the way to unlock the doors. That is the way the Easter people should live.

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<sup>3</sup> King Duncan, "Who Will Take Away the Guilt?" [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.