

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John 20:19-31

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." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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."

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." 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." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 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."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Saturday April 27, 2019
Sunday April 28, 2019
Wednesday May 1, 2019

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The Rev. Malcolm Hee

SERMON

I am deathly afraid of toads.

You know, those large brown ones that sit right in the middle of where you need to walk. The ones that can stay very, very still, but somehow leap out at you when you least expect it.

It sounds silly and juvenile, but this fear is real and it paralyzes me. I just want to run into my house, slam the door, and be safe from those monsters.

The story we have from our Gospel reading today begins with the disciples experiencing fear too.

Who were they afraid of and why?

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Last week, Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and related to them what he had told her.

Why didn't the disciples go looking for him? Wouldn't you have gone?

I think I would.

But they didn't. They stayed behind locked doors. The reason was "fear of the Jews" but that doesn't seem like a good excuse. It made no sense.

So what was really making them afraid? What were they really running from? Who were they really hiding from? Could they have been afraid of running into Jesus?

You see, what if Mary was right and Jesus was raised from the dead?

What would he say if they met him? They had every reason to be afraid.

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In their minds, the last time Jesus had seen the disciples was when they were deserting him in Gethsemane. Peter had denied knowing him. They were probably ashamed of themselves.

And they thought, what would Jesus say when he saw them? Would he hold a grudge? Would he be angry?

No, rather than going out searching for Jesus, it would be far safer to lock the door and hope the whole problem would go away!

The disciples have separated themselves from the reality of Jesus' resurrection. Their doors of faith have been closed. They have shut their eyes to the reality that life is different now.

Maybe we are more like the disciples than we want to admit. How often have we locked the door to keep Jesus out?

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Maybe some part of our past, something we were particularly ashamed of, maybe fear of the future, or fear of change, and we become frightened of what Jesus would think. So we lock up our heart to keep Jesus out and lock ourselves in for fear of what might happen.

And sometimes we are not even honest with ourselves about why we are hiding or what we are hiding from. Maybe the disciples weren't keeping the Jews out, they were keeping themselves in.

But what does Jesus do? He does what he always does when we try to hide from him, "Jesus came and stood among them" and says to them, "Peace be with you."

Jesus says to his disciples, it's okay. He knows our failures, he knows our weaknesses, he knows everything we have ever done wrong and he says, it's okay, let's move on.

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But sometimes it's not that easy to go forward.

There are days when we just want to stay in bed, pull the covers over our head and close out the world. Some days it seems easier and safer to lock the doors of our house and avoid the circumstances and people of our lives. Sometimes we just want to run away, hide, and not deal with the reality of our lives.

But every time we shut the doors of our life, our mind, or our heart, we imprison ourselves. For every person, event, or idea we lock out, regardless of the reason, we lock ourselves in.

Do you notice, Jesus doesn't say to the disciples, I forgive you? There is absolutely no mention of the past. It's done. It's finished. It's not even remembered anymore. We just get this beautiful verse of scripture, "He breathed on them and said to them 'Receive the Holy Spirit'".

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Jesus invites us to start fresh and go right back to the beginning with him.

And this is the truth of the Gospel. We can hide from God because of our shame, we can hide from our past and bad habits and failures and weaknesses. But because God loves us so, so much, he will come and find us. And he will not bring up the past and make us feel shame or guilt or humiliation.

He will find us and say, “peace be with you”. It’s okay. I know. And it’s okay. We can start again.

Easter is all about new beginnings. Maybe this morning we need a new beginning with Jesus.

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He steps into the midst of our house, through the locked doors, and
breathes peace and life into us.

He breathes peace and hope into us.

He breathes peace and courage into us.

He breathes peace and strength into us.

And that breath of peace is the key that unlocks the door. So take a deep
breath, take it all in, let it fill and enliven you. Let it give you hope,
courage, and strength to unlock and open the doors of your life and then
get out of the house.

But watch out for those toads! Amen.