

# Getting Through the Doors

[John 20:19-31]

K Karpen, Sunday, April 23, 2006  
Second Sunday of Easter

[John 20: 19-31, "Getting Through the Doors," K Karpen, Sunday, 4/23/06]

"...and the doors of the house  
where the disciples meet were  
locked out of fear..."

In the Gospel according to John, Jesus appears 5 times to one or more of his disciples following his resurrection. The risen Christ appears twice in Matthew, twice in Luke and never in Mark. But the way John brings us the story, Jesus makes 5 appearances. His first is to Mary Magdalene in the garden. His second is to all the disciples except for Thomas the Twin in a locked room, on Easter evening. His third was to all the disciples including Thomas in a locked room a week later. His fourth was to seven of the disciples including Thomas and Peter, sometime later, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, when he cooks them breakfast. And finally, a fifth encounter comes just after breakfast, when he pulls Peter aside to have a little chat in order to straighten him out.

Today we hear about post-resurrection visits two and three; both of which take place in a locked room somewhere in or near Jerusalem. We know this story. At least, we know something about this story. We've all heard the expression "doubting Thomas."

We call today's Gospel lesson the story of Doubting Thomas. That's a fine thing to call it. John never uses the name "Doubting Thomas." Thomas, after all, already has his nickname. They call him "Didymus," which means "the Twin." Still Thomas does his share of doubting in the story. However, just for today, I'd like to suggest that we rename this story "The Story of the Doubting Disciples."

We meet these doubting disciples as they are shutting themselves up in a house, locking the doors because they are afraid. This is just after Mary Magdalene brings them her astonishing message "I have seen the Lord." But they lock themselves away. They are disciples, but they are doubting disciples.

They have heard this amazing story from Mary. Two of them had been to the tomb and found it empty. They are all some kind of witnesses of these incredible events the last three days. They have been to the cross! They have been to the tomb! They are the witnesses! They are the people of the resurrection! These guys are the disciples of Jesus! They have walked with him and they have talked with him. They are the disciples! But they are doubting disciples.

That's why they are all locked up. That's why they are hiding in a house. That's why the doors are closed; because they are full of doubt and their doubt leaves them full of fear.

[John 20: 19-31, "Getting Through the Doors," K Karpen, Sunday, 4/23/06]

Their fears and doubts however, don't seem to bother Jesus. Jesus is used to their doubts. Jesus comes to them. Jesus himself comes to them! Jesus himself is standing there suddenly in the middle of the house. How does he get in? How does he get through the doors? That is a good question! That is a great question!

At the tomb, the stone is rolled away. That's how Jesus gets out of the tomb. In the garden Jesus is real enough and solid enough to touch, although he asks Mary not to. He doesn't look like some ghost, some spirit. She thinks he is the gardener! When he's in the house with the doubting disciples, all the disciples except Thomas the Twin, Jesus invites them to come close and look at his hands and looks at his side to see his wounds. There were real wounds in his real body. And then he speaks to them; real words from his real mouth. "Peace to you," he says. "Just as God has sent me, I am sending you!" "You're not going to be just disciples anymore, not just a bunch of doubting disciples. Before you followed, now you are sent."

You are *aposteo* -- sent. You are apostles, he tells them. "You are those sent out by God; those sent out by me." So, what do they do? Do they charge right out of there, eager to do the will of their risen Lord? I don't think so. Because look where they still are a week later: right back in that very house.

Are the doors open? Nope. They are shut. No one can get in and no one can get out. They're still just a bunch of doubting disciples. Their doubt makes them afraid and their fears keep them inside. They can't get through the doors.

You see, there is nothing unique about Thomas. He's not unique - of course he's not. Why do you think they call him the twin? He is just one more of the doubting disciples; shut in and behind locked doors. Somehow, they can't get through the doors. But Jesus can get through. As Elsa pointed out, Jesus can get through the doors. And here he is again. Ostensibly, he's there for Thomas. Thomas has laid out exactly what he needs to work through his doubts and overcome his fears and get through the doors. So, Jesus comes through the locked doors once again and gives him what he has asked for. Jesus invites him to see the mark of the nails and to put his finger in the marks where the nails have been. Jesus invites him to put his whole hand into the wound on his side. He invites him out of his doubt and out of his fear. Thomas can only say, "My Lord and my God."

[John 20: 19-31, "Getting Through the Doors," K Karpen, Sunday, 4/23/06]

We live behind doors. We live our lives behind closed doors. Of course we do. We even live our faith behind closed doors! Like the doubting disciples, the doors are shut by fear. Fear of our doubts; fear of ourselves; fear of our friends; fear of our co-workers; fear of other Christians; fear of other strange Christians. Most of the time, our faith is the last thing we share with anyone. What are we afraid of? What are you afraid of? Are you afraid that someone will think you are weird? They probably already do. Are you afraid of your doubts? They don't seem to bother Jesus. They us hold back, but they don't hold Jesus back. Are you afraid that someone will think you are a Christian? People think what they want to think. People see what they want to see. People say what they want to say.

Last night the drains outside in the window wells got clogged up with leaves and began to back up in the heavy rains. So I went out, crawled into the wells, cleared out the debris and the water flowed again. This morning, they were clogged up again, so I did it again. I climbed over the little iron fence. I scrambled onto the grate over the well. I lay on the grate, I reached in and I grabbed a fistful of leaves. When somebody walked by and looked over the little fence, he saw me lying there and said to his friend, "See, I told you they still have homeless people here." I just looked up and smiled. To tell you the truth, I'd rather be thought of as a homeless Christian than as another Christian locked up in the house.

We hear a lot in the United Methodist Church about "Open Doors." "Open Doors, Open Hearts, Open Minds." We think that means that the doors should stay open so that anyone can come through them. It does mean that to us and it should mean that to us.

Jesus, though, has something more in mind. Jesus wants those doors open so we can get out of here once in a while and do what he told us to do. Now, the doors we keep shut won't keep Jesus out. Not those doors at the back of the church; not the doors of our houses; not the doors of our lives; not the doors of our minds.

I was recently listening to someone telling the story of his coming to Christianity. It came to him through a dream, oddly enough. While he was safely shut up in his room, in his apartment, it came to him. But the way he described it, he said it was like Jesus punched a hole in the sheetrock. Jesus punched a hole in the sheetrock protecting his life; in the sheetrock of his mind; in the sheetrock of his heart. Things have never been the same since. Or so he says. Jesus meets us where we are. Jesus meets us doubting disciples wherever we are. If we give him a chance, he'll give us whatever we need. All he asks is this: Once our doubts have been somewhat lifted, let

[John 20: 19-31, "Getting Through the Doors," K Karpen, Sunday, 4/23/06]

go of the fear. Let go of the fear, open and unlock the door and go through it. Act like people of the resurrection. Act like an apostle. Do what he sends you to do.