

John 20:19-31 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹⁹When 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." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin^[a]), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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."

²⁶A 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." ²⁷Then 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." ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe^[b] that Jesus is the Messiah,^[c] the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

"Ministry Behind Locked Doors" – John 20:19

On the evening of resurrection day, the disciples met behind locked doors for fear of the religious authorities, the same authorities who had conspired with Pilate to put Jesus to death. We can understand their fear. They'd heard reports of Jesus' resurrection, but they didn't yet grasp the implications. They too feared being out to death, as Jesus had been. So they huddled together in the Upper Room where they had shared the Last Supper with Jesus. But suddenly, even though the doors were locked, 'Jesus came and stood among them and said "Peace be with you."' John 20:19 Yes, the Crucified and now Risen Christ was standing there with them, and he had come to minister to them. Is it true for us, too? Yes, it is. Even behind locked doors, Christ comes and ministers to us.

Isn't that our situation today? We are behind locked doors, partially from fear of course, and also because we are obedient, law abiding people. We want to protect ourselves and

one another. Most of our normal activities are on hold. Even going outside for a walk takes some careful planning. We are suspicious of almost everyone and everything these days. And I know it's wise, but even the most introverted person is getting restless.

Like the disciples on resurrection night we are huddled behind locked or tightly shut doors. Sometimes we are behind other kinds of locked doors. Fear has locked people in long before Covid-19 came along. Some of our fears are reasonable, but others loom large in our minds. Sometimes we are fearful of the future, fearful of failure, fearful of death, maybe even fearful of our loving God. And these fears can keep us locked in, making us afraid to venture forth and live the abundant life God has planned for us.

We can sometimes be hemmed in by the locked door of doubt. Thomas was behind such a door. Heavens, he wasn't even with the disciples on resurrection night, no doubt grieving deeply over Jesus' death. And he wouldn't believe them when they told him, "We have seen the Lord." 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."

Many people stand behind the locked door of doubt. They want to believe in God; and in the Risen Christ, but for some reason they just can't. They stand on the threshold of faith, but somehow they won't allow themselves to make the commitment. And honestly, crises like Covid-19 don't always help us to believe. In fact, they may even raise doubts about God in our minds. Some people stay behind the locked door of doubt because they demand more evidence, as Thomas did. Now, there's nothing wrong with asking for evidence. Christianity is a rational faith and can provide 90% of the proof someone might ask for. But a commitment of faith always requires a small leap of faith. And that's true about so many things in life. We may be quite sure, but never 100% sure before we make a commitment. Getting married, investing in a business, purchasing a car, or even buying a pizza, requires a leap of faith. It requires that you put your trust in someone. Now good evidence can be given for the truth of the Christian faith, and for Jesus' resurrection, but coming to a personal faith does require a person to push open the door a bit and venture forth. But still some people remain behind that locked door of doubt, demanding of the Christian faith a level of proof they don't require of other things.

But as we've said there are many ways we can be hemmed in by locked doors. "When it was evening on that day... the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear."

But here's Good News. The doors were locked but "Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'" Even behind the locked doors the Risen Christ came and ministered to them. Locked doors could not keep him out. He showed them his hands and his side. And they rejoiced. They knew for sure that he was Risen and alive. And those words "Peace be with you," were so important. It was Jesus' way of saying to them, "You

fell away and abandoned me, but all is well. I am your Saviour. You are forgiven. You are restored. You are my disciples. You are in God's grace and in God's love forever. Be at peace."

A week later the disciples were in the Upper Room again. Jesus' first appearance had certainly calmed their fears somewhat. This night the doors were not locked but just shut. That was progress. And now Thomas was with them. Again Jesus came to them behind those closed doors and stood among them. He turned to Thomas and gave him the evidence he demanded. And without even touching the wounds Thomas made the great leap of faith, saying to Jesus, "My Lord and my God."

The Risen Christ still ministers to his people. Even behind locked doors Christ comes and ministers to us. Locked or closed doors are no hindrance to the Crucified and Risen One. Behind the locked door of doubt he comes to dispel your doubts and to kindle true faith in you. If it's evidence you demand, he will lead you to that evidence. Christ comes with grace that is greater than our sins. Christ comes to give you courage which is greater than your fear. Christ comes to cast out all our deepest fears— our fear of God, because he reveals God as our loving Heavenly Father; our fear of judgement, because he took our judgement upon himself; our fear of death because he defeated death's power by his own death and resurrection. All our fears are overcome by Christ's perfect love.

Right now you are likely in your home, behind locked or closed doors, maybe alone or with your family. But Christ has come and is standing with you. He is saying, "Peace be with you. Despite all that is going on, things will be alright. God is with us in this struggle. My Father is fighting against this evil COVID-19. And though the battle is hard, even for God, He will be victorious. My resurrection proves it. See the signs of God's mighty arm at work. See that many are recovering. Yes, many are sick, many have sadly died, but the numbers are less than the projections. See the advances in treatment. See how people are working together and caring for one another. God is helping you to do that. And remember that God is giving eternal life to those who die in faith. For God is a God of resurrection power. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive." So says our Risen Lord, as he ministers to us.

Even behind locked doors Christ comes and ministers to us. He is standing with you wherever you are today. Right now he speaking to your heart and mind, "Peace be with you. Do not doubt but believe." By the power of the Holy Spirit, He is present in this sacrament that we will share in a few moments. Be open to receive the work that he is doing for you and in you and through you.