

THIS IS THE DAY

Based on John 20:19-23

It had been an overwhelming day. At dawn, the women had left the house, eyes heavy with tears, and hearts heavy with grief, to prepare Christ's body as was the custom. Mary had returned with unbelievable news.

"He was not in the tomb. He is alive. We were talking with him! We thought He was the gardener, but it was Him. He spoke to me! He called to me. It's true. I do not lie. He is alive, just as He said!"

You can imagine the disbelief by the disciples. Having spent a night buried under sacks of grain and dried beans in the cellar of friends, quaking in fear of discovery by the Roman guards who continued to prowl the streets and minds cloudy from lack of sleep, Mary's words must have seemed to be nothing more than the ramblings of a distraught woman. In the Gospel of John's account of the events of Easter Sunday, the disciples did not leave their hidden sanctuary in the heart of the city to see for themselves what Mary had

told them. If indeed, their lives were in such danger by both Roman soldiers, and a

rowdy crowd in the streets, it would have been difficult by mid-morning, for them to slip away to the grave and back, without being discovered, or seen by a familiar face, or betrayed to the authorities.

So, in the Gospel of John's account, the disciples stayed put, continuing to hide as the day wore on. But now, their imaginations ran wild with possibilities of what Mary had really seen. "Maybe it's true. He said that death could not overtake Him. Is this what He meant? Will he come back for us? Will we see him? What do we do next? When will it be safe to leave this hidden cellar? ...But what if it's not true? What if it is a hoax? What if His body was stolen? What if the Romans or the Priests are behind this, trying to lure us out to be captured? What future is there for us?

So as we, the believers two thousand years later, enter the story at Verse 19, three days of emotion have taken the hidden disciples to the breaking point. The shock and horror of Calvary. The cries of

the crowd, emboldened by the spirit of a festival weekend and too much ale. The silence that followed the mysterious earthquake and fierce wind that ripped the temple curtains in two. The

feet of Roman soldiers parading by their hidden place hour after hour as they tried to maintain peace in the streets. At each pass, the disciples wondering, "Is this the time will we be found? Will it be our turn on a cross next?" The plunging depths of grief at the loss of a friend, a leader, a purpose in life. Shame at their own actions (or inaction) over the last few days, their minds playing scenarios of how to return to their homes in the coming weeks, or would they? Could they? Did they even have a home they would be welcomed back into? The disciples did not need to wait for Thomas to arrive to bring doubt. They were already well into the second-guessing, all on their own.

In the midst of all this, we are told,

Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" (v19b).

"So how did Jesus get through the locked door?" you might be asking yourself. Well, it would be easy to get side-tracked with that question. "If Christ was more Spirit than body at this point," you might speculate, "then of course, He could float through locked doors!" If Christ was body and flesh, then others would claim, "He performed a miracle!" And we know that He was capable of that. It is also possible, if we are

speculating wildly, that Mary gave Him a key before she ran home, and the scribe never recorded that part of the story. Or that the family who were hiding the disciples were trusted friends, who had given Jesus a key months before, in case He ever needed a place to spend the night.

So now that I have your attention, let me say this. I am interested in the door, but not whether it was locked or not. I am interested in the fear that was outside the door, and the fear that was inside the room. Is that not why Christ came to save the world? So that we no longer have to be afraid of what is out there in the big bad beautiful world? And also, so that we no longer have to be afraid of the shadows and insecurities and anxieties that live hidden in our minds?

My friends, the disciples were afraid of what might come upon them from outside their hidden room: Roman soldiers, conspiracy, betrayal. But they were equally afraid of the doubts and the indecision

that lurked in their hearts. They were paralyzed by this fear, about who to trust, and what to believe. Are we not just like those disciples from time to time?

There are those around us who are afraid of the world, how fast it is moving, how quickly things are changing, afraid to embrace new things for fear of losing the past. There are those around us who live with hidden troubles, lingering memories and private timidity, who second guess themselves and feel unsure in their emotional footing. We doubt. We want to believe, but we are afraid. Whatever side of the door you find yourself on, Christ says to you, "Peace be with you. This is your day!"

The truth of the matter is, each of us rises to the morning sun, knowing that there are things we are confident about, and things we are anxious about. We chose, to embrace the day and all that it brings, or to turn from it, for fear of what we might encounter: on the other side of the door (the world)

or inside the door (your heart). Christ's victory on the cross, though, gives us the grace, the courage, the forgiveness, and the inspiration, to face the world within and the world without, both sides of the door, to choose to say, "This is the day, and I will live it fully!"

The world will continue to have its problems. Your heart will continue to hide secrets. I can guarantee that there will be things that happen in your life, and news on the television which will make you anxious. You will doubt. There will be moments you wish to close the door on it all, and throw away the key. But the Psalmist suggests a different approach. And the events of Easter morning give us the confidence to approach life fully, knowing that we will prevail though times of doubt, moments of fear, and seasons of indecision. Whatever side of the door you find yourself on, remember this, Christ is there also, His peace is with you. He whispers, "This is your day! Rejoice in it!"