

“BEHIND CLOSED DOORS”

READING: *John chapter 20 verses 19 - 31*

INTRODUCTION

It was the resurrection day. News had reached them that Jesus, their Rabbi, had risen from the dead. Despite the fact that he had told them that this would happen, they were not entirely sure that the women who had visited the tomb that morning were in control of their faculties. Why should the risen Lord appear to the women and not to those who had been with him constantly over these past 3 years? But then again, after how they had acted in the past few days, why should he appear to them? They had denied him. One of their number, Judas, had betrayed him and then took his own life. When he needed them most, they fled and were now in hiding.

But what was actually keeping them behind closed doors. Was it fear of the Jews? Was it fear of Jesus getting revenge? Was it shame for what they had done? Put yourself in the place of the disciples, how would you be feeling?

Whilst these disciples were on a self-imposed lockdown, some of their experiences will mirror those felt by some today in our “lockdown”. Those experiences of fear and anxiety – worrying about what is happening around us and to us. Worrying about when it will be safe to go out and about again. Maybe worrying about the experience of isolation and loneliness creeping on.

In our reading, we read that **“when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst...” (John 20 verse 19)**. I wonder if fear of the Jews was their only fear? When Jesus came and stood in their midst, what did they feel? Whatever it was, they didn't really have time to take it all in, because we continue to read **“...and He said to them, “Peace be with you.” (verse 20)**. Despite the joyous news that had started to be spread around from the garden tomb, these disciples were terrified.

This greeting was as traditional one much the same way as when we would meet someone and say Hi, hello, how are you. But for these disciples this was much more than an ordinary greeting. Jesus could have really taken the opportunity to lay into them for their previous cowardice and rejection. Warren Weirsbe in his commentary on this passage reminds us that the work of the cross was “peace”. The Psalmist tells us **“He has not dealt with us according to our sins; nor punished us according to our iniquities” (Psalm 103 verse 10)**. Later, the apostle Paul was to tell the Christians in Rome that **“we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5 verse 1)**. Whilst the humanity's sin declared war on God, Christ, by his death on the cross, had brought peace for all who would believe. Jesus was not there in the midst of the disciples to exact his revenge, but rather to

bring peace to their hearts, for them to experience the **“peace of God which passes all understanding...” (Philippians 4 verse 7).**

Having spoken words of peace, we go on to read **“..He showed them His hands and His side.” (John 20 verse 20).** This was no spectral appearance, no ghost. This was their Master, standing in their midst, with the proof of His sufferings to prove, as if He needed to, that all He had said had come to pass. The price had been paid. *There is a story I read recently of a woman who was seriously ill in hospital. The hospital chaplain was called for and came to her beside. He looked at the lady and said to her “Is there anything you need to confess to me before I give you absolution?” The woman opened her eyes and looked at the priest. “Give me your hands” she said. Rather bemused, the priest reached out his hands. She took them and looked at them carefully. “The only one who can forgive my sins, “ she said, “has scars in hands.”*

The scars on his hands and side were not just proof of who he was, but were the evidence of a price paid and that the peace He spoke to those present was more than a greeting, but a reassurance before He spoke again to commission them – **“So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent me, I also send you.” (John 20 verse 21).** That fear of having let Jesus down, that fear of being rejected by the one they had let down, was not realised. To their amazement, Jesus – the One who had called them to follow him in Galilee, the One who uttered the words “Follow me”, was now confirming that original call. In the next chapter, we read of Peter personally being recommissioned by Jesus. I wonder if he struggled to accept the fact that, in the company of the other disciples, where Peter was included in that commissioning, did he struggle to accept that despite his faults and failings, Jesus could still use him. How many times have we felt that we have “blown” our opportunity to be used by God. God never makes a mistake. When He calls, He uses for His glory. Surely no greater encouragement can be found than looking at the many men and women God has used in scripture. The list of those listed in **Hebrews chapter 11** are a reminder that those great people of scripture have not always been totally obedient to their “calling”. If God can use these, can God not also use us. **Jacob was a cheater, Peter had a temper, David had an affair, Noah got drunk, Jonah ran from God, Paul was a murderer, Gideon was insecure, Miriam was a gossiper, Martha was a worrier, Thomas was a doubter, Sara was impatient, Elijah was moody, Moses stuttered, Zaccheus was short, Abraham was old, and Lazarus was dead.... God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the CALLED!**

As you continue to read **John 20**, you soon realise that Thomas was not present on this first occasion when Jesus appeared to the disciples. When he returned to the group, the disciples were quick to share their news. But Thomas, for whatever reason, refused to accept their word until he had personal proof. We have been there, I am sure, on many occasions - “I'll believe it when I see it” – and Jesus did just that. Once again, Jesus appears behind the closed door and the one who has become known as “Doubting Thomas”, actually proclaimed **“My Lord and my God.” (John 20 verse 28).**

In this period of lockdown, we find ourselves behind closed doors physically for our personal safety and to protect the NHS. For some, they may find themselves locked behind a door of fear – fear of things we do not understand; fear of the consequences of past failures; fear of what the future might hold.

To those behind the door of fear – Jesus appears and speaks “Peace to you!”

To those behind the door of doubt – Jesus appears and shows his scars.

To those behind the door of failure – Jesus appears and restores to service.

To those behind the door of sorrow – Jesus appears to comfort.

Let us just pause here and now. Close your eyes. Put everything completely out of your mind. Now hear those same words from our Lord, Jesus the Christ. “Peace, be with you.” In these troubled times the message remains very clear. Jesus is our HOPE.

“Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” Isaiah 41 verse 10

God has pursued you your whole life. He has tried so hard for you to fall in love with Him. From natural beauty like sunsets, crashing waves, the grandeur of mountains, and twinkling stars. All these things, God has created, and He did them so that you would fall in love with Him.

But our past has blinded us. We’ve been hurt before, so we’re afraid to love again. We’ve had unanswered prayers before, so we’re afraid to trust again. We’ve failed before, and we’re afraid to reach out again. But the words of Jesus come ringing loud and clear again: “Peace, be still.” The fears that come from following Jesus are just as real as those fears that keep us from following Jesus, but when we follow Him, He gives us a calmness and assurance that He’s going to be with us anyway.

So what keeps you hiding behind your door? What keeps you from doing something brave for Him? You probably know what you’d like to do, but are too afraid to do. I say, don’t keep those doors locked. Don’t let those fears haunt you. You see, the locked doors didn’t keep Jesus out; they just kept the disciples in. Your fears will keep you stuck and trapped, unless you decide to follow Jesus wherever He leads. I know your hurts and pains and fears are real; I’m not saying they’re not. I’m saying, you will not be able to follow Jesus unless you overcome them. For the next 3 weeks, we will be required, for personal safety reasons, to stay behind closed doors unless it is imperative for us to be out. But we do not need to hide behind the doors that would prevent us from experiencing all that Jesus would have us experience – his peace, his love, his joy. Jesus still comes through closed doors.

JOHN CHAPTER 20: THE EMPTY TOMB

Mary Magdalene came to the tomb in need of consolation
Only to find the tomb was empty, a mystery without explanation.
She ran to Peter and to John her heart in great distress.
"His body is missing," she exclaimed. "Its location is anyone's guess."

Both disciples ran to the tomb; John arrived first to peek,
But Peter actually went inside some evidence to seek.
There was the wrap of linen with spice, the head covering folded neatly.
Though Christ had said He would rise again, they missed this truth completely.

Peter and John just went on home their questions unsatisfied,
But Mary remained there at the tomb, her head bowed as she cried.
She stooped and looked in the tomb again, saw two angels sitting therein.
Mary must have wondered how they arrived and when.

"Why are you crying?" the angels asked her anguish recognized.
"They took away my Lord somewhere," the dear saint testified.
As she turned to leave the tomb she addressed the gardener nearby,
"Did you take away my Lord? I came here to say my goodbyes."

"Mary," Jesus said right then. Her heart leaped as she heard Him speak.
"Teacher," Mary shouted out, her voice a joyful screech.
She desired to embrace Him tight, never to lose Him again,
Jesus told her soon He would live in the hearts of all saved men.

"I have to go to heaven first, but tell your sisters and brothers.
I am ascending to my Father, the God of all the others."
To believe in a God who is dead and gone would be fruitless and naïve,
But the empty tomb would give them all a reason to believe.

So what are we to learn from this? What does it show us true?
It reminds us how needy the disciples were, unaware of what to do.
Instead of rejoicing and praising God, they hid behind locked doors.
Like them we cower in fear at times, afraid of what might be in store.

But God has called us to walk by faith and not to let fear control us.
God's thoughts about us are only good. He desires His love to show us.
So don't find yourself doubting God; don't second-guess His intentions.
You live in two opposing worlds: a body and spirit dimension.

This glorious God whom you serve has might beyond belief;
He wields resurrection power to effect your needed relief.
Don't be a doubter like Thomas was or hide from your destiny.
Take your place in the army of God; the world needs you desperately.

This power of God raised our Lord into the heavenly realms
Placing Him over every king, the Captain at the helm.
This power was expressed for all who trust Him as Lord and Saviour
Our message to the world is this: He is God's redeeming life-saver.