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Easter 2A
John 20:19-31

"The door was locked for fear of the Jews," John says in today's gospel.

Maybe. But I'm sure there was more to it than that. But John couldn't just come out and say it.

Yes, Jesus' disciples were probably afraid that their fellow Jews might have wanted to see them on the business end of a cross. But that's probably not the only reason the door was locked. They might have been afraid of something - or someone - else. And they wanted to keep that person as far away from them as possible.

The announcement of Jesus' resurrection might not have been good news for the disciples. They knew what they had done. They knew that they scattered like scared rats when Jesus was arrested. Peter knew that he denied knowing Jesus while Jesus was being questioned and tortured by the police.

They knew that, while Jesus was hanging in torment waiting for death to take him, the only comforting eyes he saw were the women - and John.

Everyone else had disappeared when things started getting real.

They probably knew that their abandonment was just as painful to Jesus as the nails in his hands and feet. John says that the door was locked for fear of the Jews. But I wonder if the door was locked because there was one specific Jewish rabbi they were trying to keep out.

They had heard that Jesus was back. And now they were in trouble.

Was Jesus angry? What was he going to say when he caught up with his disciples? What was he going to say to those who betrayed and abandoned him - the disciples who were all talk and zero action?

To those who, by their behaviour, showed Jesus that they didn't really believe a single word that he said, what would he say?

What would YOU say?

"Where were you when I needed you?"

"You said you'd follow me anywhere, even to death. What happened with that?"

"I made you a leader, but you turned out to be a coward."

"With friends like you...I don't need these nasty Romans."

They were sweating because they might have remembered Jesus saying, 'Everyone...who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.' (Matt 10:23-33)

It gets worse. Jesus also said, "Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38)

Harsh words that I'm sure were swimming in the disciples' ears. So they knew what to expect when Jesus caught up with them.

That's what I'd expect if I were them because that's probably what I would say if I were in Jesus' position.

Was all that talk about following Jesus wherever he went mere bluster and bravado? Tough talk? Stuff that guys tell each other to prove their manhood?

Or maybe they really believed it about themselves. Maybe they really thought they had what it took to follow Jesus wherever he led them.

And when the crunch time came, and Jesus was arrested, they learned something about themselves. They learned that they were afraid - afraid of pain, afraid prison, afraid of death. Afraid to actually trust God.

It was easy to get all pumped up when things were easy and they were among friends. There was a romance about their movement. They were going to change the world for God, even if it killed them.

But when the time came to put their lives where their mouths were, they abandoned everything they said they said they believed in.

They failed Jesus. They failed God. They failed each other. They failed themselves.

It makes me think that news of Jesus' resurrection was met with as much fear and trembling as joy and

celebration. I wonder if they were in that locked room for a closed-door meeting to get their stories straight.

What were they going to tell Jesus when he finally confronted them? What COULD they say? This behaviour is hard to put a good face on. Try as they might, even the best spin doctor in the world couldn't present betraying and abandoning the one they confessed as Lord as being a good thing. They were stuck.

All they could do was wait for Jesus to show up and suffer the consequences.

As they soon discovered, the locked door wasn't enough to keep Jesus out any more than a grave could keep him down. He simply appears right in front of them. And before anyone could say something, before they could offer up whatever lame excuse they came up with for their actions, before they could even say "sorry" it's Jesus who speaks first.

"Peace be with you."

That's it. That's the first words Jesus says to those who took off when things got tough. That's the first thing that Jesus says to those who said they didn't know him, because it might have gotten them into trouble. That's the

first thing he says to those whose familiar faces he was looking for as he hung dying in excruciating pain.

"Peace be with you."

No anger. No judgment. No harsh words. Just forgiveness.

Were the disciples surprised? Probably. I know I would have been. I would have expected a verbal trip to the woodshed. Or worse.

But nothing about any of that. Not a word about what the disciples had done. Not a peep about the abandonment and betrayal. Not a sound about the cowardice and lack of faith.

Just "peace be with you."

It turns out Jesus knew something about the disciples that they themselves didn't know. Jesus knew what they were capable of. He knew that they were capable of great faithfulness and courage. He knew that they could perform works that would astonish them.

He knew that they were able to do what they said they could do,

He knew that their words could re-create the world,

He knew that their hands could heal those in pain,
He knew that their songs of praise could open graves,
He knew that they could follow him into death - and
beyond.

Or at least they will be able to. Jesus knew who they were,
and Jesus knew who they were going to become. He knew
that God wasn't finished with them quite yet.

I know God wasn't finished with them because Jesus didn't
just forgive them. He gave them a job. And not just any
job. He gave them a job usually saved for God alone:

"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.'"

Forgiving sins. Retaining sins. That's quite the authority to
have, don't you think? That's quite the power to give to
someone who treated you so badly.

But that's how God works, isn't it? That's what God does.
God forgives. God renews.

Jesus wasn't the only one resurrected that day. His disciples were made new as well. They learned something new about God along the way. They discovered that God can work with ANYONE to accomplish God's mission.

They learned that their limitations will not stop God's future from arriving. They discovered that even though they turned their back on Jesus, Jesus never turned his back on them. They realized that not even their worst deeds can stop God from bringing out their best.

But that's not always easy to believe. Especially when we think about ourselves, and think about how God wants to use us for God's kingdom accomplishments. The voices inside our heads often remind us of our limitations rather than our possibilities, and we wonder if there is anything left in us that God can work with.

I'm too old. I'm too young.

I'm not smart enough

I don't have the right education

I don't have the right background

Do you often hear yourself say things like that? I think everyone, at one point, does.

But God has a different message for us. God has a different message for YOU

It's God who says, I can use you just the way you are. And I will use the gifts that I have given you.

It's Jesus who says, "You may have been told that you're not good enough for others, but you're good enough for God.

"You may not be smart enough for those who called you dumb, but you're smart enough for God. You have gifts that they don't."

"You may not have the right kind of letters after your name, but you bear GOD'S name."

"You may have a past that follows you wherever you go, but God has a future for you that no one can take away.

"You are not the sum of your failures. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, your past has no claim on your future. The old chains are broken, God has given you the victory"

“People may tell you that you haven’t come from the right background, but you are part of God’s family.”

“You may have reached your golden years and wonder what you can still do for the kingdom, but you have Abraham and Sarah to tell you that you’re not done yet.”

“You may think that you’re too fresh from the baptismal waters and lack the knowledge and insight of more mature believers to do any good in Jesus’ name, but you have Samuel, David, and Mary to show you that youth can change the world when God jumps into your life.”

Just like all of us who've been named and claimed as God's own children, YOU are part of God's resurrection mission. God has given you a job that was once saved for God alone. YOU are part of God’s great adventure of bringing forgiveness, peace, mercy, justice, healing, and grace to the world. YOU are conscripted and commissioned to do good in Jesus’ name, because he has broken into your life, and filled you with the power of his resurrection.

Neither sin, nor betrayal, nor abandonment, nor locked doors can keep Jesus out of your life. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, and nothing can

prevent God from recruiting us - us-recruiting you- for God's mission to the world.

We are God's. You are God's. No one can keep us, no one can keep you, from becoming who God wants you to be. Nothing can stop you from living the resurrection life that God has in store for you and for us!

That's because:

Christ is Risen! And so are you! Alleluia! Amen.