

Beloved, imagine with me, if you will the 11 disciples gathered. They were gathered in a room behind closed doors; shivering, aching, grieving and ashamed.

Ashamed because when Jesus was arrested, they ran. Ashamed because Peter denied Jesus. Ashamed because the one they believed to be the only hope for their world had been crucified like a criminal.

And now fear hung in the room like smoke. Fear of Roman guards. Fear of the religious authorities and fear that they would be next. They were afraid because everything they gave their lives to had come undone.

They were together, yes—but not in triumph. They were together in trauma. Locked away, hidden, waiting and wondering what would come next.

And if we are honest, this room is not unfamiliar. Because all of us know what it is to live behind locked doors. Not always wooden doors with iron bolts. Sometimes doors within ourselves. And these doors are locked too. Locked by grief, fear, by betrayal and disappointment and by the quiet shame that whispers, *I should have done better*.

The disciples were so afraid and ashamed and filled with grief that they locked the door and hid. Listen to what happened next.

John 20: 19-31

The disciples waited in fear. And then the LIGHT entered the room. Not a flashlight or a candle. But the Christ. The risen Christ.

John tells us: “While the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid... Jesus came and stood among them.”

How familiar is that? How often do we live behind locked doors? Not always physical ones, but sometimes emotional ones or spiritual locked doors. Fear we can't name or a wound we dare not expose. Doors locked by grief or by disappointment, or by fear of what comes next.

Perhaps some of us came this morning carrying locked rooms within us, and yet the good news of Easter is this: Jesus does not wait for the doors to open. He comes anyway. He enters our locked rooms, he enters fear, uncertainty, grief doubt, even shame.

This is grace. He came right into the middle of their fear. And his first words were not rebuke, nor disappointment nor correction. He said, “**Peace be with you.**” Not once, but twice.

And this is no casual greeting. In Greek, which the Gospel was written – Jesus said “Eirene”. Eirene is derived from a verb meaning “to join or tie together as a whole” – so Eirene implies restoration, bringing broken pieces back into harmony. As a greeting it also signifies reconciliation (peace among people and with God), a wish for wholeness and tranquility and a blessing for wellbeing. Like the Hebrew, “Shalom” it means more than just our simplified Peace.

Jesus was not merely calming the nerves of the distraught disciples, but he gave them a blessing and a hope for their future and their present. With these first words, Jesus was restoring their world. He wasn't giving certainty or explanation – or even admonishment at their fear – he was just giving his peace.

To the broader church in North America, that matters deeply because too often we try to *do* church from a place of anxiety and panic and fear. We fear our freedom will be taken from us – we fear the church will die – we fear different and new ways of doing church and thinking about God. We fear this so much that we have a lot of trouble opening the doors – to peek out and also to let others in.

Peace be with you. Shalom, Eirene, Peace be with you. Be at peace. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Peace first. Sending out into the world, second. Wholeness and reconciliation, before evangelism. Shalom before mission.

This is deeply resonant with our Anabaptist witness. We are not sent out as converters, as conquerors or as those who dominate conversations in order to win arguments because we speak the loudest.

Bringing others to the love of God through coercion, fear and threats of eternal flames is not how God sent Christ to us. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” The disciples were sent out as peacemakers, as bringers of wholeness, of reconciliation teachers, as healers and people who witness to the Love of God by touching the unclean, and welcoming the abandoned sheep back into the fold.

“As the Father sent me, so I send you” Into wounded relationships, into divided communities, into a violent world and into anxious homes.

But then comes one of the most breathtaking moments in all of Scripture: Jesus breathed on them. “Receive the Holy Spirit, he said.”

This takes us all the way back to the beginning of the word when God formed humanity from dust, God breathed into Adam the breath of life. Those locked in the room breathed it in. The risen Christ breathed again a new creation.

Friends, Easter is not merely Jesus coming back, it is God beginning the world again. A new resurrected people; a Spirit-breathed church. And the same breath that breathed the creation into life breathed new life into the disciples – and breathes into us. Can you feel it? Can you feel that resurrected breath on your cheeks? Does it stir your hair and fill your lungs?

The risen Christ is still breathing on us and through us; is still breathing life into fearful disciples and empowering us to GO, filled with the spirit.

And yet, here is where the story catches me. Because even after Jesus appeared and breathed on the disciples; even after he commissioned them to go out into the world and make disciples...even after all this, a week later they were still behind closed doors.

This is where the Greek opens the text for us. The word used for “closed” or “shut” is **kleiso**. *Kleiso*. Closed. Sealed. Shut in. The disciples were not only in a closed room. They became a community closed by fear, shame and uncertainty.

Kleiso is linked to another Greek word: **Ecclesia**. Literally, the ones who are called out. The gathered people of God. Literally: **not closed**. Open, unlocked, unsealed and free. The opposite of *Kleiso* is *Ecclesia*.

Jesus did not live his life in fear of death – nor did he run when his time came. His resurrection was the ultimate door-buster.

Christ says: Come out. Be free. Go. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

And then there’s Thomas. Poor Thomas has carried the shame and the name “Doubting Thomas” for centuries. But doubt is not the opposite of faith; indifference is. Doubt often means faith is alive enough to wrestle. Thomas was not faithless, Thomas was grieving. He wanted truth and he wanted something real enough to stake his life on.

And Jesus did not shame him, instead Jesus came back for him.

And this is good news for every questioning heart. We see it all throughout scripture: Mary doubted, David doubted, Jeremiah doubted, Sarah laughed, Naomi doubted, and Thomas doubted.

Doubt is not failure. Sometimes doubt is the birthplace of deeper faith. And doubt is exciting because it puts you in a place where anything can happen next. And what happened? Thomas cried, “**My Lord and my God.**” His doubt did not destroy faith; it refined it, deepened it and personalized it.

You see, the breath of the risen Christ may not always be seen, but it is always known by its warmth. That breath is not meant to stay in the room. The disciples received it so they could carry it into the storm.

They were sent out to go beyond the locked doors into fear, conflict, and into wounded places. They were sent out into a world that even today still longs for peace.

We too are sent out and have been breathed upon by the spirit to abandon our closed rooms. To go as **ecclesia**. Not closed. Not sealed. But open. Free. Sent.

Christ calls us to carry shalom into storms. Carry peace into anxious places. Carry mercy into divided communities. Carry the Spirit into wounded hearts. And when questions and doubts come, do not fear them. Let them deepen you until your own heart can say with Thomas: **My Lord and my God.**
Amen.