

**Behind Closed Doors**  
Menno Mennonite Church  
April 26, 2020

**Purpose:** To implore the congregation to reach out in faith and believe the promise of the resurrection.

**Message:** As disciples of Christ, we are not alone in our doubt, but are welcomed to come to see the risen Christ and believe in the hope of the resurrection.

**Scripture:** John 20:19-29

**Synopsis:** We are asked to take a lot of things on faith. Almost daily we receive any number of statements and admonitions that we are asked to embrace on the basis primarily of faith, and by in large we accept things largely unchallenged or on face value. Yet, despite our wide exercise of faith in many areas of life, often we find ourselves hesitant to accommodate questions of faith when it comes to our religion. Even in our doubts, Jesus stands ready to allow us to come and encounter him and the hope of the resurrection.

John 20:19-29

[Easter II--March 30, 2008](#)

[John 20:19-31](#)

[We've had weeks like this ...you all know what I mean. The week after a marriage p  
In touch with Doubt John 20 19-31 3-30-2008.doc](#)

## **John 20:19 - 31**

<sup>19</sup> When 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."

<sup>20</sup> After he said this,  
he showed them his hands and his side.  
Then the disciples rejoiced  
when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>

Jesus said to them again,  
"Peace be with you.  
As God has sent me, so I send you."

<sup>22</sup> When he had said this,  
he breathed on them and said to them,  
"Receive the Holy Spirit.  
<sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any,  
they are forgiven them;  
if you retain the sins of any,  
they are retained."

<sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve  
was not with them when Jesus came.

<sup>25</sup> So 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."

<sup>26</sup> A 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." <sup>27</sup>

Then 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."

<sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

<sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him,

"Have you believed because you have seen me?  
Blessed are those who have not seen  
and yet have come to believe."

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs  
in the presence of his disciples,  
which are not written in this book.

<sup>31</sup> But these are written  
so that you may come to believe  
that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,  
and that through believing you  
may have life in his name

You would think that this is the world's shortest sermon. "Once upon a time, there was a guy named Thomas. He missed the boat. He wanted to touch Jesus in order to believe. Don't be a Thomas. Amen." I mean it takes some doing to have your very name become a synonym for doubt and to be reduced to Cliché for one of the only recorded acts you witness within the canonical gospels. Fun fact—there is such a thing as the Gospel of Thomas, one of the Gnostic Gospels that never made the canon we know as the Bible. There is even some suggestion among academics that this whole episode is here in John to try to address the Thomas school of thought. But academic trivia aside, it is hard to hear much of Thomas in any other way than that of a cautionary tale. Which is a shame because it reduces a whole element of the Christian encounter of the resurrection to a message of "do this or else." Personally, I am a whole lot more interested in the actions of Jesus than I really am about the hypothetical failings of a particular disciple. Because in that I think is the real message.

Resurrection, as we would have it, is a fairly binary thing. You were dead, now you are alive and the party can get underway. We throw the switch and begin the party. But as we have seen time and again in dwelling with these Easter stories—the women at the tomb, the disciples along the way to Emmaus, and the coming of Jesus into the room where the disciples had socially distanced themselves, the light took quite some time to dawn on them and know what was going on. Hope—the wild hope of good news, unexpected news, glorious news—does not of itself eradicate fear. The primal notion of encountering that which we cannot understand runs pretty deep. Also, recall that the disciples had a good deal to fear on that day, and not just those who put Jesus to death in the first place. They might even be a bit afraid of the one who just shows up in the midst. The last time they had seen Jesus it was to swear to him up and down that there was no way no how that they would ever be so cowardly as to deny that they knew him; that they would die if they must to follow where he led. Now here he is back, and I have to wonder just how pleased they were to see him, wondering as they may have been how Jesus would encounter them. I mean think about it: when they are first told of a risen Christ, they tear off for the tomb. Now they are locked away and fearing what they might face. Talk about an awkward social situation. "Yea, Jesus, about that whole take your cross thing...yea sorry" Jesus was back, and this time, for all the disciples know, it's personal. These disciples had failed, doubted, and not measured up to expectations in the time of Jesus' greatest need, spectacularly so. Thomas is not the only one of the disciples with doubts, with fears; he was just the one who,

being gone, and missing it the first time, got a show all to himself later on. What ever the case may be, I think it is this fear that is locking them away is precisely what this whole interlude is about far more than just the impertinence of a particular disciple in insisting on his up-close-and-personal Jesus moment.

We cannot underestimate the role fear can play in our lives, especially when we are locked within it. I spent all of the Spring Breaks of my high school years doing the same thing: I spent the week trudging around the mountains of the Eastern National parks. As a member of the high school geology club, we would work all year for the chance to spend the week hiking with trail-side education on the geological processes at work by the ever affable Mr Shonk. It was great fun, and we were given a lot of trust, provided that we would stay within range of the patented “Hoot” of our leader (which was a good ways). But being early march, sometimes things went off the rails. One hike I recall, we had been prepared for the Southern weather only to be surprised by a late season 10 inch snow storm on the trail. This slowed us to a crawl coming down from altitude, and soon enough it was pitch black with only a single flashlight between 20 of us. The slick rocky trail was treacherous and it was a struggle to move at all. Even more so when fear took hold. The person I happened to be hiking with was just such a person. She became so disoriented and petrified of the darkness around her, the only way we could make any head way at all was for me to physically place one of her feet in front of the other to navigate down the slick rocky scree. She simply could not move out of fear of what might happen if she would. I wasn't a whole lot better spare simply knowing that the only thing worse than moving blindly down the trail was standing still until whenever we could see our way forward. But somehow we all made it—finally emerging from the trailhead around 10 PM. It was an unforgettable journey into the dark and the power of fear to stand in the way of even what you want most.

I think that there is far more here in Jesus' response to the disciples fear and disbelief for all of us then there is in evaluating the credulity of Thomas. Jesus comes and enters in beyond the locked doors that would bar our fears. Beyond the isolation that would lock us away and keep us safe, perhaps, but locked up all the same. We lock our selves away all the time for fear. Sure, right now being locked up for fear has a bit of the a ring of the all-too-realistic (to a ridiculous extent). But we have all sorts of ways of locking ourselves away in our own little cells lest someone else find out what is really going on. We lock ourselves away lest our

sensitivities be found out and made known for the whole world to see. We fear the honesty about our own doubts and questions before those who would walk with us just in case our faith is found wanting, and our questions place us on the outside. We fear that our pasts might not measure up to the present expectations that we would take for ourselves. We fear that even that which we are genuinely afraid of in our selves, in our world, somehow makes us unworthy of the Savior who comes to us and bids us “peace”. For as many reasons, as many lives, and many people who are hearing this today, there are reasons we lock ourselves up, in certainty that there are simply things about ourselves that we “should be” or that we “ought to do”, those fears and shames that we think that separate us from the love that God has for each one of us, those places where new life cannot penetrate. We’re afraid of what these things say about us, and even more so, what our Savior would say about them.

But this is where I think that the proof the John is offering us of the physical resurrection here takes on an even more important meaning than what is right in front of us. Because no matter how deeply we would hide, or how well we would lock the Door, Jesus can enter into those spaces of our lives and offer us peace, offer us the resurrecting breath of the Holy Spirit. We are not faulted for our fears, or chastised for our lack of confidence, but rather embraced and held, and given what we need to take the next step down the road. Jesus comes and declares that no matter how you find yourself, no matter the doubts and the uncertainties of life, the mysteries that just can’t quite get solved, no matter the pain or pressure or imperfection, God’s love stands ready to embrace you, to fill you with the spirit of hope, and to sustain you for the work of the kingdom. God welcomes us as we are, whether firmly convinced, or deeply questioning and not sure what the answers are, or if there are answers at all. God is able to work despite our doubts, despite our fears, despite our failings to again and again bring forth the hopeful kingdom of God. We are called to walk forward as we can, growing all the time into the hope and the promise of the life breathing God that works in every situation, every soul, walking along side us, even when fear would keep us locked away.

The resurrected Christ reached out and embraced his fearful, failing, doubting disciples, opening himself to be what the father God had called him to be from the first; the embodiment of that wondrous love that penetrates every locked door, that embraces every doubt, and breaths new life into even the most lifeless situation. This is the hope that we have in the resurrection;

that there is nowhere that we can go, no question that we can ask, no hurt that we can bury, no uncertainty that we can face; no matter what, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

May this be our hope, our joy, and our sustaining reality forever more. Amen.