

Time to Unlock the Door

This is the second Sunday of Easter, not the second Sunday after Easter! We have just started the celebration of the risen Lord. This celebration lasts 50 days. During that time we contemplate and celebrate the call to all of us that Jesus issues in the post resurrection appearances. The focus of these passages during season of Easter is on that time between the crucifixion and the Pentecost account that we read in Acts.

Every year we begin the season of Easter with what many label as Doubting Thomas Sunday. There is a problem with that. The focus really should not be on Thomas and we tend to give poor Thomas a bad rap anyway. This week the focus is on the image of the closed and locked door with the fearful community behind it.

Yet we have two views of community in today's reading. John's community is behind locked doors for fear. The other community in Acts shows a joyous open community now of about 5000 just a short while after.

This prompts one to ask so what changed? What changed is found in the locked door! Jesus comes through the locked door and commands them to go out. Notice he doesn't knock, unlock the door or even open the door. He simply appears inside the room. There is a lot of symbolism in that entrance.

Then he greets the disciple with the words Peace. A peace that is unique to Christ. Then he breathes on them, which by the way is John's Pentecost moment when they receive the Spirit. Finally Jesus says the critical command, "Just as the Father sent me, I send you." This has echoes of his command, the mandatum of Maundy Thursday, "Just as I have loved you so you should love one another," from the foot washing passage.

Jesus leaves and Thomas arrives to find out that he has missed the great event. We like to pick on Thomas, but think about this. He was apparently the only one not locked behind closed doors. He was out and about. Like many of us he seems skeptical. Now we tend to be hard on Thomas but think about this.

The one thing that I never noticed until this year was that a week later the disciples are still behind locked doors! Jesus has appeared to them, breathed the Holy Spirit upon them in John's version of Pentecost and commissioned them. Yet a week later they are still behind closed doors! They had the appearance yet nothing has changed. The whole group of disciples and by the way the word is matheti, which applies to all of the followers, not just 11 men are still behind a closed door.

Jesus comes again and again. Jesus comes and gives us what we need to do the work he gives us to do. The locked door is a metaphor for the lock we put on the door to our heart. We love to hide behind the thought, well if Jesus had appeared to me then it would be easy to believe. The disciples show that to be false. Jesus has to come to them several times in John's gospel. When he comes to them on the beach, what are they doing, they have gone back to their old day jobs as fishermen! Jesus comes to each of us again and again and slips

through the lock we place on our hearts. To be honest many people fear that intense entry of Jesus into our lives. We fear what this presence may require of us. Yet if we know Christ there is no way of locking him out. We may choose not to respond, but he always keeps trying.

So too Jesus keeps showing up inside the locked doors of our communities. How will we unlock our doors? First of all we must unlock the doors of our own hearts. This is the sin that Jesus refers to in our passage. The sin is blindness to the revelation of Christ. The sin is being unwilling to share the good news. The sin is sitting behind our doors and thinking well at least I'm saved. There is more to this however. We need to move past waiting for people to come to us. That just is not going to happen in today's world. Just unlocking our doors is not enough. We must go out the doors into the world.

Jesus has taught us during his life what it means to be fully human. In death and resurrection he commands us to go out and show the world what it means to be fully human. The focus you see is not on salvation, but the coming of the kingdom in this world. This is a very different focus than many in the Evangelical, Pentecostal and fundamentalist world. There the focus is on personal salvation. The challenge for these churches that a new generation of preachers like Jim Wallis is promoting is for them to realize that we are called to make a difference in this world right now and let personal salvation take care of itself. The Episcopal Church has long had that focus and what has been lost in our recent squabbles is this looking outside past the locked door. We need a balance of maintenance and mission if we are to be a healthy vital church as a parish, as a diocese and as an international church.

This evangelism thing is hard for most of us. We all wrestle with doubts and any who claim they do not have questions are not really being honest. Paul Tillich writes that the consequence of faith is doubt. We in this world only see in a mirror dimly. That is our lot as mortals. We live in the faith and hope that we will after death be united with God and Christ in the love that is the greatest of all spiritual gifts, but in the meantime we live in the world of hope and faith that is constantly plagued with doubt. And that is ok. What most people want is someone to walk with them on their faith journey, not tell them what to do.

Now as for that, if I had only experienced the risen Christ this would be so much easier. We all experience the risen Christ every time we come to the table to be fed by the holy food and drink of the Eucharist. A real experience of the true presence of Christ is not the rare experience we tend to think of, but the focal point of our worship experience.

I find it interesting that some Baptist friends of mine say we never have an altar call. An altar call in that sense is where the person comes down front and proclaims that they have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. This is a once in a lifetime type of profession often followed by baptism. They seem to think that without a John Wesley type experience of a warmed heart we are not truly Christian. I answer that we have an altar call every week, the Eucharist. We are all called forward to come and kneel at the altar rail, ready to receive Christ in our outstretched hands. We profess our acceptance of Christ every week. We

encounter Christ each and every week in the Eucharist. This is why the Eucharist is our principal service.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Even more blessed are those who unlock the door of their hearts and of our church so that more may believe. So come to the table. Taste and see that the Lord is good and that his presence is with us to the end of time.