

John 20:19-31

The doors were locked.

**The doors were locked for fear of the Jews, means, in context, for fear of political reprisal.** Scripture verses like these, blaming “the Jews” have been used for centuries to fuel antisemitism. It’s important to remember Jesus was a Jew who worshiped in the Temple. He did not come to reject Judaism but to fulfill the law.

The disciples were associated with their leader, with Jesus. Religious leaders had aligned themselves with political leaders as a mutually beneficial means of maintaining and wielding power. This was why religious leaders were feared. We see this alliance between religion and power today, with the false gospel of Christian Nationalism.

**The doors were locked for fear of political reprisal,** for fear that those hiding inside would be associated with a message that casts the mighty from their thrones and sends the rich away empty, that lifts up the lowly. For a message that inverts hierarchy and is indifferent to temporal power.

**The doors were locked and their friend was dead.** Imagine having spent 3 years side by side with love incarnate, imagine that feeling of belonging, of acceptance, of nurturing and spiritual communion that spending time with Jesus would impart. Then imagine him dying, brutally executed by the state.

A few chapters earlier in John 14, Jesus has told his disciples, “I will not leave you orphaned” (Jn 14:18). How will that be? Can you imagine asking, lump in your throat, “How will you not leave me orphaned?” Jesus tells the,, “. . .the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you” (John 14:26).

Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit and then he gives the disciples another gift: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives” (Jesus 14:27)

**peace (eirēnē - εἰρήνη):** harmony, tranquility, safety. Jesus offers a peace different from the world’s, a peace in which sin, violence and death has lost its power.

After these promises, Jesus then passes through the suffering that awaited him, suffering his followers could not anticipate. And in three days he arrives in the locked room with the disciples hiding in fear. And here the first thing he says to them is “Peace be with you.” He could have said I told you so but he keeps it holy. “Peace be with you.”

Thomas is out and about when Jesus appears. The disciples find him, tell him they have seen the Lord. Thomas asserts, “Unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands and put my hand in his side I don’t believe you.” Maybe he was thinking, “Religious fanatics, leave me alone in my grief.” First century snark and cynicism.

Anglican scholar Andrew McGowan explains it was not so much resurrection that was the stumbling block for Thomas. There was a general belief in resurrection in Judaism. In John 11:24, at the tomb of Lazarus, the weeping Martha tells Jesus, “I know, he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

The reason Thomas insists on seeing the marks in Jesus’ flesh, McGowan asserts, is that “First, the marks should show that this risen one is actually material, a physical body. . . The other and more significant issue is identity; was this person, whom the rest of the twelve had seen, really Jesus?” (Andrew’s Version, “Thomas and the Body of Christ”)

[https://open.substack.com/pub/abmcg/p/thomas-and-the-body-of-jesus-8eb?r=13mi9&utm\\_medium=ios](https://open.substack.com/pub/abmcg/p/thomas-and-the-body-of-jesus-8eb?r=13mi9&utm_medium=ios))

In the Gospel of Luke this scene behind the locked door describes the disciples being troubled and afraid that they were witnessing a ghost. Thomas wants assurance this is Jesus in the flesh. Thomas is not doubting that Jesus *can* rise. Thomas is wanting validation that

*the* Jesus who was raised up on a cross to draw the world to himself, the “fulfillment of the incarnation” as McGowan puts it, is in fact this same Jesus appearing to the disciples.

Eight days later Jesus appears again to the disciples and Thomas is with them. It’s important to note here Jesus is not offended by our doubt. Thank goodness...enough of you have told me, “I don’t believe the Creed.” You’re safe here.

The God who created us and keeps the universe in motion can also contain our doubt. Regarding doubt, theologian Paul Tillich paraphrases St. Augustine saying, “in the situation of doubt, the truth from which one feels separated is present. . .” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology* v. III, p. 228).

That is to say, like Thomas in his doubt, in your doubt Jesus is standing in the room waiting to reveal himself.

In the room, after Jesus greets his friends with peace, he says 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.”

Thomas sees, touches. Thomas prays, “My Lord and my God!”

The resurrected Christ still bears the signs of his suffering in his body. Divinity, heaven, restoration does not erase what we have suffered in our bodies. Closeness with the divine does not equate with a syrupy, toxic positivity that ignores suffering.

This is why Holy Week liturgies are so important. To celebrate Easter without walking alongside Jesus in his suffering is to proclaim a hollow Gospel.

I was once at a friend’s house in high school and I saw a greeting card his mother was writing to a friend. (Yes, I was nosy.) She signed it, “Blue skies and green lights forever.” Barf. My brooding, emo, depressive self recoiled at that sentiment. I was 15, and was so offended by that expression I am preaching about it 40 years later.

Before I was a Christian, I thought “Blue skies and green lights forever” was the saccharine positivity demanded of Christians. Blue skies and green lights forever is Easter Sunday without rejection. It is resurrection joy without witnessing Jesus being lashed and hung on a cross. It is denying the evil of this world that met Love incarnate and violently rejected him.

Jesus tells us in John 12:32, “when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.” It is on the cross that Jesus draws us all to salvation. On the cross Jesus shows us his solidarity with us in our sufferings. And at his resurrection he reveals to us who it is who made the promise.

Lord, I believe.