

## EASTER TWO, YEAR B, APRIL 7, 2024

Well, Friday brought quite a surprise to most of us who felt the earthquake, didn't it? It's not something we experience in this part of the country very often. It was totally unexpected. How many of you were confused and wondered what just happened? How many of you thought it was an earthquake? How many of you thought it couldn't possibly be an earthquake? How many of you wanted to run outside? How many of you didn't know what to do and prayed it would just go away? How many of you were scared?

Translate all those feelings and it sums up pretty much what the women and the disciples felt that Easter morning and the days after. Even after it was confirmed that we experienced an earthquake it was hard to process and comprehend that it happened to us. I think that's what the women and the disciples were feeling. When the aftershock occurred, it created another moment of fear as to how much more can we deal with.

Again, I think what we felt and what went through our minds on Friday was no different than what the women and disciples had experienced. They were having difficulty processing what had happened to them. It was all unexpected. They were fearful, they weren't sure what this "thing" resurrection actually meant to them or even how it impacted them. They were torn in how to respond and how to act.

So, it's no wonder that the disciples were behind closed doors a week later even after hearing the good news that Jesus had risen. Even after having seen Jesus these same disciples are still more comfortable behind closed doors than they are in the streets in which they live because of their lingering fear and doubts. We have this belief that they were immediately rejoicing in the news and ready to turn the world upside down. But what we discover are disciples that are literally behind closed and locked doors, wrestling with these issues and trying to comprehend what they should do about it. These disciples had heard the news but had not yet been transformed by the news.

In many ways we are like the disciples in those first weeks. Many of us are locked in behind closed doors both literally and figuratively. How many of you have multiple locks are your doors to keep you safe and unwanted people outside? However, locks come in all sizes and shapes.

I remember when my great grand niece was born 10 years ago in a hospital here in NJ. The security to get into the maternity ward to visit was impressive. You had to show a photo ID to a guard who wrote your name down before they unlocked the door. Inside the ward no one had access to the baby unless the baby was in the mother's room. Even when my grand niece went to get her daughter from the nursery she had to show the band on her wrist as did the father which corresponded to two bands that were on the baby's legs. But the best part is the lojack that was secured to her umbilical cord. The baby was literally under lock and key so no one could steal her from the hospital.

So, you see locks do come in all sizes and shapes and they can be invisible as well as tangible. If you have suffered some ordeal, if you have experienced some kind of trauma you might choose to lock down your emotions. If you suffered injustice in your life, or been the object of discrimination, or bullied it is likely that you may have

wanted to lock your feelings of anger and shame away to protect yourself from additional assaults or from lashing out.

People have locked themselves in invisible closets for all sorts of reasons as a coping mechanism to avoid fear, intolerance, and bigotry that most often comes from society. But we also have a tendency to lock our minds and hearts from looking at the world through Christ's eyes because a lot of times what Christ calls us to do is opposite of what we want to do or feel. We're afraid of those who think differently than we do about all kinds of issues because underlying all that is the fear that perhaps our viewpoint may be wrong or worse contrary to what Christ asks of us. And it's scary! It's better to stay behind locked doors than to question or explore our fears.

The great champion of lay ministry and author Verna Dozier wrote that "Doubt is not the opposite of faith. Fear is because fear will not risk wanting you to know the truth. Fear wants to keep you behind those locked doors. Fear doesn't want you to question anything that differs from what fear wants you to believe because it might open you to new possibilities and specifically God's truth.

I wonder if what really happened that day in Jerusalem is that Thomas, refusing to surrender to the fear which kept the rest of his friends locked behind a bolted door, ventured out for fresh air, to clear his head from the devastating thoughts – and then had the courage to return to the community. And there Jesus met him exactly where he was.

As it often does, the Gospel raises some questions for us to ponder. Have we cowered behind invisible locked doors created by our own fear – even understandable fear – based on experiences we have had? Have we cowered behind locked doors because we have closed off our minds and refuse to look at any other possibility? Are we aware of how even the church since the beginning has operated behind closed doors, excluding people from its life and ministry out of some irrational fear or lack of understanding, and in that process has actually kept Jesus from getting in and living among its members?

One of the things we have to do is to check ourselves to make sure that our hiding places have not become our preferred places or our places of comfort. Staying behind locked doors we deceive ourselves into not dealing with the issues that keep the poor, poor or the hurt, hurt. It keeps those who have been knocked down and who have been stepped on in their places we don't have to see. As Christians, however, we cannot stay behind those closed doors and we have to wrestle with the many issues we want to flee from out of fear or ignorance of the truth.

We like to believe the early church was a perfect church. Nothing can be further than the truth. Amongst its leaders you had a denying Peter, a competitive John, an ambitious James, and, yes, a doubting Thomas. The same book of Acts that describes this church as a bold and shining witness to the resurrection is also honest to tell us that it was often embroiled in conflict and embittered by controversy. This is nothing new. In the early church you could hear the noise of discord almost as often as the notes of peace. If that oh-so-human and imperfect bunch could rise with Jesus above its own fears and pettiness to be an Easter church, then maybe we, too, sometimes in spite of ourselves, can manage to be the presence of the living Christ in the world.

There is so much we can do where we live – our home, business, neighborhood, to remove the bolts, the obstacles, the deadlocks that may be keeping someone from

experiencing the Shalom of God, the peace of the Lord, the radical welcome of the Risen Jesus bringing them from fear to faith.

The Resurrection tells us that there is many more little resurrections as our everyday world of life and death collides with the world of grace – a divine phenomenon from which none of us can hide.

When people laugh and cry together over the joys and disappointments of their lives, when grace and mercy, not condemnation and harshness, govern our relationships, and when we and the church opens its heart and its doors to whoever comes yearning for the love of God, excluding no one, then it breaks open the locks.

And so, on this Second Sunday of Easter, the unimaginable has happened. Just like the earthquake has altered our experience and understanding of the power of the unexpected, let us not hide behind the locked doors of fear, intolerance and oppression but burst open those locks and truly live as people who believe in the power of the resurrection and new possibilities that we can't even imagine. Amen.