

**2 Easter – Year B – April 19, 2009**  
**Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31**  
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Some of you already know I have something of a fascination with doors, especially the metaphorical kind. A favorite prayer of mine is that God will open the doors that need to be open and close the doors that need to be closed. From time to time, we all find ourselves in the kind of situations where it really seems like more of our doors are closing than opening. We may even be feeling so trapped that we look around frantically for the door, and can't see what God has planned for us. It is times like this when our anxiety level goes up, and we get hooked into the ubiquitous fear factor of navigating life in a tough world.

In today's Gospel reading, the fear among the disciples is palpable. As far as they know, Jesus is dead. They have not yet experienced an encounter with the risen Lord. The writer of John's Gospel does not leave us to speculate. The disciples are clearly not excitedly planning some blockbuster book and movie deals to publicize the incredible miracle of the resurrection. They are not taking calls from the *Today Show* to discuss what they know about Jesus, nor are they on their cell phones calling the Jerusalem Herald with the headline news that the Lord is risen! No, and not just because none of these things existed in their place and time. They are not even standing on the street corners joyfully proclaiming Jesus lives! Instead, the disciples have the door closed and locked because they are afraid for their lives. Their leader is dead, and their hope is in tatters. Jesus was murdered for insurrection, and they have every reason to believe they'll be next.

It is amazing what fear can do. It wipes our memories clean in an instant, while simultaneously heightening all our senses. Blood rushes to the major muscles in our arms and legs, preparing us to respond to the perceived threat. In the tunnel of terror, our bodies are programmed to take action in one of two ways to ensure our survival: we either fight for our lives or make a run for it. The reactive survival instinct tends to dull our capacity to think as well. In the heat of the moment, the disciples have forgotten what Jesus told them: "I am the door...and whoever enters by me will be saved." Understanding their salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection is not yet a manifest reality for the disciples. In the immediate threat of danger, they are not wasting any time reflecting on the implications of Jesus' missing body. The door to their hiding place is locked, and the door between their minds and hearts is shut tight. That also means that the door to the Kingdom of God is temporarily blocked for them.

I began to learn some words in French when I was five. One of the first words that the teacher shared with the class was the French word for door: 'la porte'. Looking at the linguistic roots of words makes it easier to see how the English language was shaped. 'La porte' sounds a lot like portal. Portal conjures images of gateways, entrances, and thresholds. Images of ports filled with ships ready to sail into unknown adventures. In author Stephen King's "Dark Tower" series, portals -- doors -- play a significant role as the gateways between the realities of life in two distinct but interconnected worlds. Other authors also use the image of portals to stretch the limits of our imaginations and help us to see and be from a different perspective. The resurrection is certainly a new perspective.

The disciples experience Jesus in two distinct but intimately connected realities. They have known and followed Jesus in his humanity, as flesh and blood just like them. They have broken bread together, laughed, cried, and walked many miles together on the road to Jerusalem. Then when Jesus appears in their midst they immediately experience Him in an entirely new way that is His resurrected reality. Theologian NT Wright says the disciples now see the risen Lord in His "transphysical" state. Wright's definition effectively captures for us Jesus' transformation from death to new resurrected life wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit. It also helps us grasp the fact of Jesus' physical bodily presence among His disciples. This is no ghostly visitation. Jesus invites the disciples to see and touch the scars of the wounds he suffered in the crucifixion. Jesus is the Word made flesh, and in His resurrection, Jesus retains a bodily presence.

Jesus **is** the door to salvation. For believers, no physical door or barrier can prevent Jesus' presence among us. There is no real or imagined boundary that can separate the disciples, or you, or me from Jesus. In the words of the apostle Paul, "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." In this time and place, we mostly experience Jesus' presence in a spiritual sense – as the peace that passes all understanding. Yet, we must always remember that the risen Lord is not bound by earthly limitations: only humans are. To know Christ in *any* way is truly a blessed gift; one that we are compelled to share.

By the time Thomas arrives, the door to God's Kingdom has been blown wide open for the other disciples. They have now met the risen Lord and they are transformed by God's peace, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Filled with a deep and profound new life in Christ, they will never be the same again. This is their Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Within this gift is an indescribable mystery, where hearts are bound with Christ's, in a beautiful confluence of mutual love and reconciliation. Thomas saw that change writ large on his friends' faces. In the depths of his grief at Jesus' death, Thomas has come seeking comfort and consolation. Poor Thomas is a bit late to the party and has missed the main attraction. Instead of finding sorrow, he finds celebration. The rest of the disciples are overwhelmed with joy.

I like Thomas, don't you? He's down-to-earth in a gritty John Wayne or Clint Eastwood kind of way. We know from Scripture that he's the one who bravely encourages the disciples to follow Jesus to Jerusalem, knowing that it might mean death. Thomas is also the one who willingly admitted to Jesus that he didn't know where Jesus was going *or* how to get there. That makes Thomas copasetic in my book – he's humble enough to ask for directions! Thomas doesn't want to settle for second best. He wants to know that Jesus is risen firsthand, if you'll pardon the pun. God knows there are a lot of Thomas' in the world, and God is still willing to meet those of us who are just like him, precisely where we are. God is still willing to give us a sign so that we too might believe. Look at St. Augustine's conversion that came by way of a child-like voice in a garden telling him to "take and read" the Scriptures. Many saints in the history of Christianity have stories to share about our own conversions. There are no closed doors to God's grace and hospitality. God is always knocking and ready to enter the hearts of all who are willing to receive Him. Thomas does not have to wait long. A week later, his prayer is answered and Jesus invites him to see, and touch, and believe. "My Lord and my God," Thomas declares. Knowingly or unknowingly, Thomas gives voice to the fullest expression of Jesus our Lord and Savior. Jesus is our king and the true ruler of the world.

The disciples are the first gathering of Christ's followers to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. They are empowered to be living doors offering a gateway to God's Kingdom. With the indwelling Holy Spirit, You and I are also empowered to be witnesses to God's presence to all who know us, and even to those we meet along the way. Like these first disciples, you and I join in this community of faith, sharing our faith stories that are all a part of the greatest story ever told. Christ's victory over sin and death, the forgiveness of our sins, our freedom in Christ, are all reasons to celebrate. In the words of the late poet and author John Updike: "Let us not mock God with metaphor, analogy, sidestepping, transcendence; making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the faded credulity of earlier ages; let us walk through the door." I pray that each of us will open wide the doors of our hearts and the doors of this community of faith. I pray that we will share the blessing of new life in Christ, welcoming all, as Christ has welcomed us. God is with us and we have nothing to fear. Alleluia. Jesus lives!

Amen.