

Behind Locked Doors

Passage: John 20 : 19-31

Lectionary occasion:

Soon after Easter.

Dear Reader,
Thank you for choosing my service
I ask you please to leave the sermon and readings as
they are.
The hymns should be OK but can be changed if
necessary.
The prayers will get dated - if you can do your own that
would be good.

God bless you.

Behind Locked Doors

Jesus appeared to the disciples through locked doors.
 The doors of God's house are wide open this morning.
 Come, enter in to worship our risen Lord.

Hymn: 208 The day of resurrection

Prayer

Rejoice! The stone is rolled away & Jesus Christ is risen from the tomb Hallelujah!

Rejoice! Love is victorious. The son of God holds out his hands for us. Hallelujah!

Rejoice! For sin no longer has a hold on us; through grace we are set . Hallelujah!

Easter reminds us that each time we deny you, another nail is sharpened, & each time we defy you, it is hammered into your hand.

When faith is weak, temptation strong & courage fails, forgive us, Lord. Become again that risen presence within our hearts.

We give thanks to you, Lord, for your living presence in our lives
 When we were walking in darkness, You were there.

When we were kneeling in weakness, you were there.

When we drew near feeling worthless, you were there.

When we were needing forgiveness, you were there.

When we were searching for mercy, you were there.

We give thanks to you, Lord, for your living presence in our lives!

Hymn:200 When Easter to the dark world came

Readings: John 20:19-31

Without a Doubt - Thomas monologue

Hymn:199 Jesus, Lord, Redeemer (Change evening to morning v3)

We come to our Easter celebrations with joy & hope & praise
 because we know the story; we have heard it so many times.

But as we did with Thomas, can we just try to put ourselves in the shoes of those friends of Jesus? They had seen Jesus tortured, beaten & whipped, thorns rammed on his head, then nailed to a wooden cross. He was dead without a doubt & with his death went the death of all their hopes & dreams of a King & a Kingdom & a brave new world of peace & love. Yes, they'd listened to Jesus' words & thought they believed them, wanted to believe them,. But such an awful death would surely have put an end to all that.

And what were they to do now? Jesus had been the centre & focus of their lives for 3 years; they'd left everything for him - & now **he**'d left them - stranded, bereft, grieving, uncertain...& afraid. What was going to happen to them now? The authorities had got rid of Jesus: would they want to deal with his followers too?

So, on that 1st Easter day, his friends hadn't all breathed a sigh of relief, glad that it was a 'happy ever after' ending. Instead, they were together, *with the doors locked for fear of the Jews.*

Locked doors. Who remembers the days when nobody locked their doors in the daytime? In the main there was trust & neighbourliness & openness. Besides which, we didn't have so many valuable gadgets to worry about getting stolen. We lock our doors for fear of unwelcome intruders, & to keep ourselves & our property safe.

In the world there are millions of people whose locked doors have not kept them safe from war, from terrorists, from religious persecution & they are knocking on the doors of countries where they believe they will be welcome & safe: they are flocking to Europe by any means they can. There they are confronted with barriers & razor wire & guards with guns. Europe's locked doors. Whilst some countries are finding a haven & home for the refugees, there is that ever present fear that opening the borders of our countries is opening them to terrorism. That is undoubtedly true & the leaders of the world have the unenviable task of keeping their own people safe as well as offering the hand of friendship to others in need.

In situations so much like that of the 1st discs, followers of Jesus today are hiding behind locked doors for fear of persecution, abduction, murder.

The world is a difficult & troubled place where in all spheres of life there are so many locked doors & barriers, so much fear & mistrust. Is there an answer?

What was the answer for those frightened discs in the upper room? Not **what**, but **who**?

It was, of course, the risen Jesus & the confirmation that he really was alive. Jesus knew the turmoil they were in, so his greeting was, 'Peace'. Just as he'd told the storm & waves to be still, so he spoke to their troubled hearts. *Peace be with you. Shalom.* He'd earlier promised them that he would leave them with his peace, peace quite unlike what the world understands. As Paul describes it to the Philippians, '*the peace of God which passes all understanding.*' Now in the upper room Jesus offered them again that peace & they were overjoyed. Transformation.

His peace, which can't be separated from the risen Lord himself, would take them fearlessly out through open doors into a world which would not always welcome them or their message. Nor does it now.

Often in our Communion services we greet each other with the words, 'The peace of the Lord be with you.' What power & blessing is in that greeting. We are praying for each other the blessing that comes from the total confidence that our risen Lord is with us in all the places we go, all the situations we face. We can do it because we have the peace of God's living presence strengthening & upholding us. What about the Church in our land, in our town? Do we feel afraid & threatened in a culture that seems determined to squeeze Christianity out? One search only found a single programme on the TV in the week after Easter remembering or celebrating Easter. Are we hiding away in our buildings & closing the doors because we feel small & powerless in the modern world? Is this where we feel safe?

But is it where Jesus needs us to be? He needed those disciples out in the world making disciples of all nations, & they weren't going to do that locked away in an upper room. He had broken open the tomb, he had broken open the locked door of the room they were in & he had to break open their fear & send them out in the power of his Spirit, filled with his unquenchable risen life.

So let us open ourselves up to the Risen Lord who came to the disciples, despite locked doors and fearful minds.

And as He brought them wholeness and peace, and made them ready for the task he had for them, may we be ready; ready to allow him to walk through the closed doors and barriers that we create so that he may take away our fears and open our hearts for the Holy Spirit to live in us. Then with the peace that only he can give may we be ready to go out in his name.

Hymn: 196 I know that my Redeemer lives

Prayer: Lord, we live today in a troubled world, where no one leaves their doors open any more, where we feel we have to lock up everything that is of value to us, where we are too afraid to use our possessions for fear of damaging them, or having others spoil them. Forgive us, Lord & help us to be open & trusting in our living.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

May I be the answer to someone's prayer today.

Lord, it's not only things that can get damaged but also people - in so many ways.

We pray for people whose lives are limited through ill health & disability, for those who find it difficult to believe there is a way out of their suffering.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

May I be the answer to someone's prayer today.

We pray for those locked into themselves through mental illness, that they will receive the treatment and understanding they need.

We pray for wisdom for those who care for them.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

May I be the answer to someone's prayer today.

We pray for all those who have to lock their doors to dwell in safety, especially Christians in hostile places; for those who live in fear of war or natural disaster, for those who suffer abuse behind locked doors.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

May I be the answer to someone's prayer today.

We pray for prisoners, for those who have to be locked up for their own safety, and the safety of others,
for chaplains who seek to bring your light into their lives.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

May I be the answer to someone's prayer today.

We pray for the Church & all of us who have been welcomed through the wide open doors of the kingdom of heaven. May our doors, our lives & our hearts be open to you, to each other & to the world.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

May I be the answer to someone's prayer today.

Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Hymn: 212 Thine be the glory

Ben: Your prison doors have been opened,
your hearts have been set free.

Go with courage, serve with humility
and support one another in Jesus' name.

Amen.