

## John 20: 19-31

This is the ending of John's gospel.

It's the first day of the week, Jesus has conquered death...Alleluia! OK so why are the doors locked in fear? FEAR!

And before we go on... I just want to say - that Fear itself is a posture (it's not good or bad per se)! It can be a very good thing when it keeps us healthy and alive...that's our survival instincts kickin in...but it can also be a bad thing when it keeps us from truly experiencing all life has to offer...and fears can be both real and many times imagined.

John's gospel comes along to reveal that the story's not over yet...in fact it has only now just begun. It wasn't about death was it? No it's about change and transformation...so what's fear have to do with all this?

Jesus comes among his fear filled followers and says peace be with you, as the Father has sent me so now I send you...He breathes on them and they receive God's Holy Spirit (Ruach)... He then comes to them a second time and they are still once again holed up in fear and then we have this scene with Thomas.

Now of all the characters Jesus meets after his resurrection none have left a stronger impression than Thomas. Doubting Thomas...that's his new name for all time after this one moment!

He represents the incredulous non-believer who hides inside every one of us – the questioner in us who wants more proof...seems we always want just a little more proof... until we don't...especially if that proof might shatter our own world view.

Now most of us experience different kinds of doubt when it comes to God...especially when everything seems to be going to hell? Where is God in the pain and suffering of the world? Why does God allow this or that to happen? Oh My God where are you when I need you most!?

What remains a constant amid all these questions is the answer to the doubt we find in John's story, an answer that contains not so much who Thomas is, but rather who Jesus is... especially when confronted with all our human fears and doubts.

It is here that we come to the point! It's a story about God... once again... God coming to us... Emmanuel – God with us!

However we are... and wherever we may be...even locked behind whatever fortresses we've constructed to protect ourselves...whether that's a physical building or the walls we construct around our hearts and minds...we try so desperately to keep away all those things that might frighten us!

John's answer begins at the door, at the beginning of the passage.

Instead of depicting Jesus as opening the door then walking right up to Thomas, and giving Thomas a rational argument - we see a very different scene. John tells us first that Jesus walks **THROUGH** a closed and locked door to get to Thomas.

It is Jesus reaching out to us, the closed or fearful skeptic, whom no one else can get to...reach...or convince. It is Jesus who refuses to let deadbolts or chains lock the movement of God's love towards one of His disciples...especially one who may be in doubt and fear and may be lost.

Nothing can separate us from the Love of Christ! He will always leave the 99 to search for the one who has been left behind...in the dark...perhaps alone and afraid. A lost sheep when frightened will instinctively freeze up and must be carried back to the fold by the shepherd...the shepherd always has to go out to the sheep.

So too it is with us. When we are filled with doubt and fear...we can become paralyzed...but rest assured that Jesus will come and meet us where we are... and how we are...even if it is at the edge of faith, even if we are locked behind closed doors or in fear.

God reaches out to us.

What a strange thing to hold on to: this certainty that our most profound answers come not because we seek them out with focused determination...but rather because God comes seeking us... through the locked doors and the walls that life, and our hardships, have built up all around us... offering us peace, hope and love at the very moment that grace may seem so very, very far away!

And note that when Jesus does come, Thomas doesn't even recognize him. So there is also a good chance that when Jesus does come to find you in your own dark place...that just like Thomas, you may not even recognize him...even when she's standing right in front of your face.

So how then are you to know when God is actually seeking you?

John leaves us with some specific clues: First he says "peace be with you". And secondly, He offers His presence to His friend in a way that only Thomas would understand...peace and presence...that's the key here.

We recognize God's presence when peace is offered and in those moments of life's most brutal experiences when we realize that we are not all alone and lost, but rather we have already been found.

It is good news indeed that throughout our lives Jesus will come to us in many ways and through many guises. But whatever Jesus' appearances may be... we will know it is God if we find... not a logically argued response to our fears... but instead an offer of peace...peace...right there in the midst of our circumstances.

Jesus comes again and again to His scared and confused disciples and offers Himself and His peace..."Peace be with you". Shalom Aleichem (the actual phrase) equates to a peace personally felt...a deep calmness that comes to those who are in relationship with God...grounded and connected with the Divine Source of All our Being.

Jesus personally calms the last of His Disciples with the proof Thomas requires, and adds "...blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." Again this theme of fear... of being hunted and persecuted reflected in the Gospels.

In fact Mark's gospel (the earliest one) just ends with the disciples running away in fear...that last part was added on centuries later by the church.

Jesus' peace will bring them inner security and fearlessness so that they now may continue the mission of continuing God's work in the harsh realities to come. See only with God's peace and presence can the Disciples (Jesus' students)... now become Apostles...God's conduits...those sent out to represent and bring God's love and peace to others in their dark places...behind their locked and closed doors.

God's peace is given both personally and through the Spirit – God's presence. Knowing that Jesus will be leaving them, this passage uses Thomas as the example for every one of us that will have to then trust in Jesus without Him physically being here.

He would now literally be with His Apostles and us in Spirit. He grants them power in His Holy Spirit...so that they now may go out into the world bringing all people, once again, into right relationship with God. Bringing others Shalom...Oneness.

The resurrection creates the Church – its unity, its commission, and its inheritance. All that Jesus has gained is now passed on to us... both as disciples (students)... and as apostles (those sent)... to continue the work of God's restoration in the world – Tikkun Olam.

Thomas is given exactly what he is looking for...he did not reach out and touch Jesus...but rather it was Jesus who offers for Thomas to touch him. And Jesus not only offers Himself the first time we fear and doubt...but He offers Himself over and over and over again to those people who need Him most...longing for hope, peace and love...that's what our world so desperately needs right now.

And Jesus gives us His peace and presence when we'll need it most.

Throughout the New Testament we see the apostles as human... even in the physical presence of Jesus. We see their human frailties in the face of fear....even Peter himself, Jesus' best friend...when terrified, denies Him to save

his own skin...Fear is a powerful motivator and it usually leaves us vulnerable and sometimes paralyzed or unable to act.

And like Thomas many of us would need “proof” in order to process what had just happened... And when needing to focus on physical proof alone... many may not even see or hear God in all the noise and fears of this world.

But I have to be honest here...if you truly want to experience God and Shalom...just open your eyes...open your eyes long enough to see God standing right in front of you!

Just remain open and you'll experience God right where you are...God will always seek you out 100% of the time in some way. I know this because...This has personally happened to me over and over and over again in my short lifetime! And God will reveal Godself in many ways known only to you...

God will always seek you where and how YOU are! There is no formula...that is why witnessing is so important...sharing our personal stories with one another...telling one another about your own experiences of how God showed up in your life!

Where have you met God lately?! ...If you ask each other that question I promise you will not find a “NO Show God” ...but rather a God who shows up all over the place... in the most wonderous and unsuspecting of ways...there are no co-incidences...only God-incidences.

Just open your hearts and minds. See Most folks believe Hate and Love are opposites (see those reflect emotional states) ...but that's not true at all...Fear is the opposite of Love. This reflects our posture in the world... That's what Jesus meant when He spoke about love...not a feeling but a posture...agape!

Fear is being in the literal and figurative posture of being Closed... Whereas Love is the posture of being open.

Now being Closed will never ever change you... and being Open ALWAYS will...most of us resist change and transformation so we reject anything that is different from the way we look at the world. We close ourselves off from

anything that doesn't look, feel and act like we do...we surround ourselves with mirrors don't we? God then becomes just a reflection of us...You come to see yourself as God and disconnect from the Source...closed and looking inwards only...that's a fear based...closed life indeed!

I love a line that Jesus uses in "The Chosen"...Matthew, the tax collector, is portrayed as oddly different (autistic)...different from everyone else and this is so upsetting to the other disciples...they are uncomfortable around Matthew...and Jesus quickly tells them "If you are gonna follow me ...Get used to Different"

Following Jesus and letting God become part of your life requires openness...and the open posture of love...so GET USED TO DIFFERENT! For that's the only way one can truly ever be transformed...only if you let God and others in...that's the open posture of love...agape!

And not much has changed from our story this morning, has it? Today we face the same fears, we look to science to tell us what is real (yet that changes almost daily), we look to our leaders and governments to set our morality (yet they stray far from God and Others...wars are still raging and those at the margins are still made invisible or are vilified by our systems of power) we look to our peers and the media to establish our norms (which provide us only vanity, self-absorption and a flavor of the month mentality)...

Like the early Christians, and Thomas, we are all still looking for answers... blessed are those who do not see yet still believe...faith and trust in Jesus allows us to step beyond the earthly self-absorbed "rat race" that we often find ourselves in.

HERE We are able to see more clearly when we are above the haze... or hear more clearly in the silence outside the day-to-day "noises" of the world...it is here and in a posture of openness that we can allow for God's Spirit to fortify us with God's Peace and God's Presence.

Let us be ever mindful of our posture...and when doubts and fears arise...and they always will... it's at those EXACT times that we need to take a step back - tune out our senses - and listen and look with our hearts...and there...right there... we will find our Lord and Savior giving us that which he gave his scared and frightened apostles over 2000 years ago...His Peace... and His Presence!

Shalom Aleichem!

Your faithful servant,  
carmen