



^{on} Sermon 8 April 2018
1 John 1:1-2:2 John 20:19-31 'Jesus Appears'

Prayer: Come to us, God. Open our locked doors and hearts. Lead us, with all our questions and wonderings, into the exciting mystery of discipleship. We long to be your Easter people, to live and proclaim new life. Amen. ^{off}

Today we are greeted with the picture of 10 men huddled together/ locked in terror from outside forces/ the authorities, *both* religious (Jewish) and secular (Roman). A **very real** fear; Jesus had been crucified 7 days earlier and **we've all** seen those movies with searches through Jerusalem for 'rebels / insurgents / followers... But in reflecting on those men and today's text, *might* they also be locked away because of their **internal** terror? Guilt being a fair word to start unpacking what might be going on for them!



Guilt – will get us every time! ^{on} Locks us up, freezes our ability to be logical, rational, compassionate, caring, loving, life giving for others... Those 10 men were locked away – *do we* do any better? Can we unlock the doors by ourselves? I want to suggest 'no', and as we know millions of dollars are spent annually as humanity (wealthy / rich / privileged) pays to try to find the key – tries to find 'peace' of mind, heart and soul.

But **we** do have the key – *when* we remember, *when* we are brave enough, when we faith enough, trust / believe. *Pisteuein* ^{1*} is a verb and should be translated as **faith**, but we don't use faith as a verb (a doing word) in English so it's often translated as believe – but "believe" is a cognitive (thinking only) function, and "faith" is more about involvement of our whole being, the orientation of a person's entire being. "Trust" captures the sense of *pisteuein* much better than does "believe." ^{off}

So do we trust the **one** who gives us the key to unlocking the fears which hold us locked, frightened, unable to be free? Do we trust the key which is to trust the One who **breathed** it into us? 7 days after he was killed Jesus came to the 10 men despite the locks and seals and stood saying – peace. Is there something here about unlocking our internal fears before we can walk 'outside'? Maybe – Jesus started inside the locked room 1. **He said** 'peace', calmed their hearts and minds, unlocked the barriers freezing them in place. The world can't give this kind of peace it is Jesus gift and brings healing with its presence.

2. Peace, then the reality of who was with them ^{on} – Jesus showed them his scars. There's something scary about Jesus scars being the proof of his being real. These men knew him – they'd walked for 3 years with him, slept with him – I've been told snoring together bonds you as a group?? These men had listened, been terrified, drunk, laughed, cried, seen the most amazing changes in people's lives, watched events unfold for the past 7 days, heard the women's testimony, seen Peter and the other disciple after they'd come back from the race to the empty tomb...



Now the figure in their midst first calms them down, peace settles on them, you know that peace; Jesus peace settling on you? **They did**, – and then he showed them the scars in his hands and side. There is something here that fundamentally challenges doubts their testimony that the resurrection was and is a myth. They **knew him by his scars**. ^{off}

I see hope for us in this, we're not supposed to be perfect, untouched by the world, or evacuees from hurt and pain; from caring, loving, ministering, following Jesus. ^{4*}Elbert Hubbard, once wrote: "God will not look you over for medals, degrees or diplomas but for scars." It is by our scars that we are recognised for real, **being** real. Christians are to be known by their honest acceptance of their scars, and show, speak of their healing, like Jesus. Can we live celebrating as Easter people – or are we locked up?

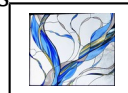
3. So, 1=peace, 2= scars/ really was him 3= sent them. ^{3*}Jesus sent and commissioned them, he gave them a job, a task – this little 'new' church, locked inside a room. It's important the number 10, it was the

1* J Petty; 2*Seasons Mediacom background; 3*W Loader; 4* K Matthews and April 1, 2015 reflection in the Christian Century, Martha Spong;

necessary number '10 men' to start a new synagogue. Remember the disciples were still all Jews at this point, they have not been cast out of the 'Temple' yet. And by this time the synagogue movement had begun. To start a synagogue 10 mature men were essential, for John this is the start of the 'new' church. Locked inside yes, but given a task for the outside!

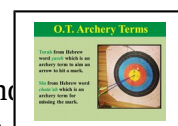
Breath window, Church of the Holy Spirit (Episcopal), Hunterdon County, New Jersey.

4. Jesus breathed on them. 1=peace, 2= scars/ really him 3= sent and now Jesus breathes on them! Not just any 'hongi' – breath and life force mingling – this is Jesus gift of the Holy Spirit of God. ^{on} Yes John really does believe this is the breath of God being shared because of the very, very specific word he uses



He uses the Greek word translated here as "breathed" is *emphusao*. It is the same word the Septuagint uses to translate Genesis 2: 7: "And the Lord God...breathed into (Adam's) nostrils the breath of life." As humanity was once given life – breath from God. So now this little church is given the same gift – John is again telling us how this is a completely new start of the relationship of God and humanity – through Jesus. ^{1*} And this is the only, the only time this word is used in the entire New Testament. ^{3*} This is John's version of 'Pentecost Day'; it's a lot quieter, smaller, locked away than our usual version! ^{off}

5. Tasked. 1=peace, 2= scars, 3= sent, 4 = breathed and after Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on them he gave them the fundamental task for the church – to forgive sins. ^{2*} "One description of forgiveness is that of letting go of any rights for retribution or retaliation." I was challenged in my background reading by this question: 'who retains the sins if they are not forgiven? The sinner, or the one refusing forgiveness? What happens when sin is retained? 1 John today *would say the non-God-dark wins!*



^{on} 'The Greek word for sin is *hamartia*. This word is also an archery term for letting the arrow fly and "missing the mark." If sin is seen as missing the mark, then perhaps it is easier to consider that once forgiven, we are invited to come back and take another shot, to try to hit the mark this time.' **Grace and peace**, in this case, may look like a quiver full of arrows." It is the task of the church to distribute arrow filled quivers without counting the cost **or** work load demand **and** as much as often as humanly possible! Tasked with giving forgiveness. Tasked with enabling success – so the mark is hit; individuals healed; enabled to be at peace with themselves; doors unlocked whether of heart or room, **and** enabled to move into the community and world – to repeat the cycle until God's kingdom is completed on earth. ^{off}

7 days after Jesus died the 10 locked away men experienced: 1=peace, 2= scars, 3= sent, 4 = breathed 5. tasked. **But** – but 8 days later and they're still there! **Still locked** in an upper room – (is it possible 'church' DNA was set within 7 days? **The DNA against change????**) **But** there it is – 8 days later they are together again and this time the one missing from the earlier gathering is present, Thomas. He has been told of the earlier meeting, **and wants it for himself** – *don't we all?* Isn't it an essential of faith that we must each one of us, come to an understanding with Jesus, accepting him ourselves?

To want what others speak of in experience is so human – and the **hope we are given** because of Thomas is awesome. ^{4*} Just like the parable of the lost sheep, when Jesus spoke of the good shepherd, (him) leaving the 99 sheep (or the 10 men upstairs) in search of the 1, Jesus comes for Thomas. **There is hope** for us because of the "kindness" and "patience" of Jesus in meeting the needs of Thomas; in effect, Jesus **is saying**, "'Better to be one who doesn't feel the limits. But Thomas, if you need to, put your hand here.'"



See the scars, Thomas? It's really is me, Jesus assured Thomas. ^{on} Just as every time we miss the mark with our living; 'fall short' of success; allow the light of God to be shadowed; the purity of the breath of God within to be contaminated; every time we sin hurting ourselves / loved ones / community again; **every time** Jesus **comes** to us. Because to retain sin is to hold onto the dark, to **let go** of God, Jesus, our breath = life when actually Jesus appeared, **gave** us our task and **sent us out**. With every breath we take our task is **to walk in the light of God and to forgive**, because Jesus unlocks doors of heart, mind, soul, metal and wood when he appears; because Jesus scarred presence is forgiveness in person, he gifts peace, breathes spirit-life, sets our task and sends us. Amen ^{off}