



GOSPEL GOSSIP

... the doors of the house...
were locked for fear of the Jews...

St John 20. 19-31

Sunday 12th April

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

This Sunday's gospel reading is actually very widely known but primarily because of Thomas' lack of belief and his demand for proof that Jesus had actually risen from the dead. The other disciples had all encountered their risen Lord, but dear old doubting Thomas... It is also, in St John's gospel, the time when Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to his followers, in a much less dramatic way than in other accounts. But that's St John for you!

What can be overlooked is the simple statement that the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews. Fear is something which was associated amongst those who followed Jesus, especially around the time of his death and resurrection. Nicodemus went to see Jesus at night, out of fear that he might be thought to be a follower. Joseph of Arimathea was also a secret follower. The disciples feared being associated with Jesus; largely they forsook him after his arrest, and Peter openly denied knowledge of Jesus three times. All because of fear. Maybe that's why Jesus' greeting after his resurrection was 'Peace be with you.'

- Is fear a good thing or a bad thing?
- What does fear effect?
- Of whom were the disciples afraid?
- Of what were the disciples afraid?
- Did Jesus really understand their fear?

In the gospels there several accounts in Jesus' parables about doors being secured: against friends who wanted a loaf of bread, of treasures being secured and so on. Doors were things behind which people and things were safe. In fortified towns or buildings, their being broken heralded defeat. We lock our own front doors, and ensure they're safely secured when we're out or in bed. Jesus said, Behold I stand at the door and knock...

Doors are also means of division. Although the current vogue is not to have formal rooms in a house, but rather 'zones', doors mark out demarcation: this is where you eat, where you sit and watch TV, where you cook, where you wash, where you sleep – and even where you keep the car. Yet in the western church certainly since the early 60's doors have been removed. Everywhere for public worship is accessible and visible: chapels, chancels, sanctuaries – no longer are there screens or gates.

- To what extent are your doors to keep you in or others out?
- How necessary are doors in terms of faith?
- What sorts of doors do you use in your spiritual life?
- Do you try to exclude the risen Christ or keep him in?
- Do you feel that the gifting of the Spirit gives you strength to 'fling wide the gates'?

Jesus understands all about us, even our fears. He seeks to reassure us at all times. But he also needs us to proclaim his resurrection. The closing words of the reading: 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet come to believe.' What can you do to make Christ visible to those who have not seen?

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!