

Somebody Call A Locksmith!

^{NRS} Joh 20:19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

I remember watching her as a kid- I was always amazed by her energy, her passion, her liberal use of sherry, and, to be absolutely honest, by her size. Even on TV it was obvious that Julia Child was a giant.

Then, as I grew older what I loved about her changed a little bit. What I started to notice when I became older was how much she loved what she was doing and clear it was that she was doing exactly what it was she was supposed to be doing. In a world full of people complaining about Monday morning and excited about any opportunity NOT to be working- she just seemed to LOVE what she was doing. Even monotonous things like chopping vegetables she did with energy and zeal. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm sure she had her days, I'm sure there were times she just wished she could cuddle up with all that sherry and call in sick. I'm sure she had them. But you know if she did- we never saw them.

No, we just saw this graceful gourmande fly around the kitchen whipping up obscure French dishes like it was second nature to her.

Every once in a while we cross paths with people like this, don't we? People who are so obviously made for what they do. People who are unaffected with the kind of questioning and self-doubt the rest of us seem to have, we who wonder, "Is this the right path, the right place, the right person?" "Is this what I'm supposed to be doing?" "Really? Are you sure, God?"

I knew some of these more certain people in seminary. People who said they always knew they were called to the ministry. Some of them struck me as blowhards- just pretending to be sure as a way of covering up the questions that plague the rest of us. But with a few of my friends I could tell it was genuine. I could tell they really did know. People who played church when they were three like others played house.

For those of you who don't know me as well- I'll just share I was not one of these people. As an undergrad I think I had about five majors in my first year alone. And as far as the church went I pretty much stuck to the fringes, keeping an arm's length relationship the Lutherans and the Presbyterians alike, showing up, but never getting too close.

Maybe that's why I like the text for this morning so much- this story with such a famously uncertain man, Doubting Thomas.

Every congregation I've ever know has had a soft spot for Thomas. Some folks love him because he's like us- he's scientific and skeptical. Unless he can see Jesus, touch him, and even put his fingers in his wounds, he's not just going to take the word of

his friends. And we who have been raised to be scientists, and I mean this in a good way, this a breath of fresh air. Don't just tell me to believe that the earth is round or flat- show me, prove it to me, right? And so Thomas becomes a kind of patron saint to many of us who want to believe in Jesus, but aren't able to snap our fingers and believe.

Others love this story not just because of Thomas but because of how Jesus deals with him. I mean you can easily imagine, given the church has behaved, that at the first instance of a disciple questioning him Jesus would rise up with fire in his eyes and smash the doubting heretic like a bug, right? I mean isn't this what inquisitions, medieval and modern, are all about? Sit someone down, give them a list of yes or no questions, and if they answer them in the way you would, they're OK, and if not, well you put them on a naughty list somewhere. The great 19th century preacher and social reformer Henry Beecher quipped, "Orthodoxy is MY doxy. Heterodoxy is someone else's doxy." Yet here Jesus doesn't act like this. He doesn't come in and clean house with Thomas. He's actually quite gracious, isn't he? He shows Thomas his hands; offers him his wounds. Now all of this is great. Doubting Thomas is fascinating and this interchange between him and Jesus is arresting. But with all of the attention we pay to Thomas- most of us miss the fact that he isn't the only one doubting here. Indeed, we spend so much time on him, most of us miss that he may not even be the most committed doubter in the whole bunch.

Check it out. The text opens with the disciples hiding out with their doors locked up tight out of fear. And this is understandable, just having watched their leader brutally murdered, I can understand the disciples being on the cautious side. I can understand the locked doors. Then, stunningly, and the text doesn't even try to explain it, despite the

bolt being drawn and the door being locked up tight- Jesus just shows up right there in their midst. He just shows up and whispers to them, “Peace be with you.” And this is great, because not only are the disciples overjoyed at seeing him again, but they see first hand that nothing, certainly not locked doors, can keep Christ away from them.

But then look what happens next. The next part is so important, so important. What happens is Jesus leans towards them and breathes on them, telling them to receive the Holy Spirit. I know this sounds strange, but the word for spirit, *pneuma*, is the same word for breath or wind. And the kicker here is that after blessing them with this spirit- Jesus makes it utterly clear what they’re supposed to do with it. What are they supposed to do? Well they’re supposed to leave! “As the Father has sent me- so I send you” he says. *Aphemi* is the term here- literally meaning send away. So Jesus comes, offers his peace, blesses them with the spirit- and then tells them to get out of there, that there’s certainly nothing they can do for the world locked up behind closed doors!

So what happens. They all leave, right? I mean having actually seen the risen Lord, having felt his breath upon their faces- I mean they are so filled with faith and excitement that they just run right out of their to hang doors and kick off their fall season and get their ministry going, right?

Well in a word...no. No they don’t. They stay right there. They even rebolt the door again.

One of the most amazing and missed lines in scripture is what we hear next. “A week later and the disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. And the doors were (and your NRSV softens this here saying “shut” but the word is locked just like it is above) the doors are locked- and Jesus appears again.”

Now we're so focused on Thomas here, and the church has labeled him a doubter for ages- but who are the real doubters here? Yes, Thomas didn't trust his friends, but come on- it was a pretty incredible story. And who knows- depending on when Easter fell that year it is the season for April fool's day. So yes, Thomas doubts. But what about his friends??? What about the disciples? I mean they actually SAW Jesus- they talked with him. They felt his breath fall upon them. They felt the power of the Holy Spirit. And he orders them out of there- he sends them away, he tells them to open those doors, to stop hiding out, but they don't move a muscle. Oh, we spend so much time on Thomas, but what about them? This isn't mere doubt but cringing disobedience mixed with doubt.

There are a lot of reasons we stay put behind close doors, aren't there? There are a lot of reasons we don't follow Christ's voice beckoning us to follow after him, to fling the doors wide, and to trust that all will be well.

Most of us have at least a little like Moses in us. You know God went to Moses again and again telling him to leave the desert and go the Israelites. Moses kept giving God reason after reason why this wasn't a good idea. *Well, what would I tell them-* Moses wants to know. "Tell them I'm going to deliver them." *Well, what if they don't believe me?* And God turns Moses' staff into a snake. Pretty impressive trick, really. *Well what if they don't buy that?* Then God tells him to stick his hand in his cloak, he does and it comes out leprous. Fortunately, when he sticks it back in it comes out healed. *Well, God...I'm not really all that good at public speaking, you really should find someone else.* And God gets angry at this, but he doesn't smite Moses or anything- he

just sends Aaron along with him to have his back. I mean Moses just throws up excuse after excuse, reason upon reason for why he should just sit there and rot in the middle of nowhere while his brothers and sisters sweat in slavery.

It's the same with you and me for the most part. Who here really lives and believes the things we say- that we are children of God? That God calls each of us and has given us a unique purpose- something that only you with your unique voice, your unique set of gifts can achieve. Do we really live like that? Or do we keep our heads down? You know what we are? We've become expert locksmiths- adept at shutting door after door in God's face, telling ourselves that there's nothing that special about us, and anyway we really don't have enough energy, or money, or time to do anything all that amazing anyway.

And you know, sometimes the obstacles confronting us really are incredible- sometimes what's outside is really scary. I don't know how many of you caught that article in the Oregonian a couple of weeks ago now, but at age 60, a woman named Toni Tortilla was ordained as Oregon's first female Roman Catholic priest, ordained in a ceremony not sanctioned by the official church of course. In the article Toni sounds just like those friends of mine in seminary who knew they were called- she always knew she was called to the priesthood. But of course there wasn't and still isn't a snowball's chance of that happening in the official church. Now folks told her to just change denominations, to go Episcopal or Lutheran or Presbyterian, but she said she couldn't- that she was just Roman Catholic through and through- that this was just who she was. And so she spent a lot of years in terrible, terrible anguish. Nancy Haught writes that she

didn't pursue her calling, but her calling pursued her, and, literally, "the doors stayed shut." But then I love what she's done. She didn't leave. And she stopped just complaining about how unfair it all was- she finally decided to do something about it. And so on August 25th she was ordained by a South African theologian and bishop, and while the official church may not recognize her, as Haught writes: "After years of disappointment, Tortorilla saw a door open so she could fulfill her calling. She walked through."

But then sometimes, sometimes it just isn't time for our doors to open up. The other day I learned something that just shocked me. Remember Julia Child- one of the most famous chefs in the world, just so obviously made for being a chef. Do you know when Julia Child, the French chef, learned how to cook? Do you know when she made her first quiche, her first soufflé? 5 right? 10 at the latest. No, she only became interested in cooking when she was 36. 36! And no one had even heard of her until she was 50 when she published her famous *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* with two other friends.

She spent the first half of her life as a writer working for advertising agencies, and then intriguingly, as an intelligence officer in the OSS, the Office for Strategic Services. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor she tried to join the Navy, but they wouldn't take her because she was too tall! So, she joined up as a spy traveling the world- living in Sri Lanka, China, and then later, fortuitously, in France with her husband, Paul.

And it was after all this, after a life and career pretty well figured out that the right doors opened for Julia Child and she figured out what she really wanted to be when she

grew up. The amazing thing about Julia Child isn't that she had no doubts and always knew what she wanted to do- the amazing thing is that it took so long for the right doors to open, and when they opened for her- that she walked right through.

Hear these words from the great Islamic poet Rumi:

I called through your door,

“The mystics are gathering in the street. Come out!”

“Leave me alone,” you said. “I’m sick.”

“I don’t care if you’re dead!”

Jesus is here, and he wants to resurrect somebody!”

Beloved the mystics are gathering. Jesus is calling through the door. Come out!

Amen.