

John 20: 19 – 31 Breaking Out of Our Upper Rooms  
April 11, 2010, Newtonbrook United Church, Rev. Allan Baker

What do you imagine as the dominant feeling among the disciples of Jesus who were huddled together in that room?

Imagine that you are among the disciples in a room where the doors have been locked for the sake of security. You're locked in a room because you are afraid of the religious authorities. In that room we're like prisoners who have locked the world out.

Imagine that Mary has already told us that she has seen Jesus – he has spoken to her, but we're not really convinced.

This old story of the disciples locked in a room in fear and anxiety is also a current story – a story of the 21<sup>st</sup> century where we are encouraged to live in fear, and to buy the best possible security systems to keep the world out of our lives. When we try to imagine locked rooms, we need to remember that many church buildings are locked most of the time! I know of one in Scarborough where the doors are locked, for security purposes, when worship begins. Maybe that locked room in the gospels is not far away after all.

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century security-obsessed society, even our homes are to be our cocoons; places of rest where the world doesn't intrude – **except:**

- through media images of shootings in quiet neighbourhoods;
- violence in the Philippines and Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan;
- or the violence of video games

The media seem to be telling us that we can never be too afraid. Lock yourself up! Get more security - even though there are statistics that demonstrate that crime rates are falling in Canada.

We do live in what Tori Smit, a pastor in Guelph calls "serious times"<sup>1</sup>.

- Marriages and relationships break apart
- Jobs and careers are taken away by "the economy"
- Canadians and Afghanis both die in Afghanistan, because of the fighting
- our lifestyle has been infected by the destructive virus named, **influenza**.

The disciples were facing a world that had changed – Jesus was gone. What would they do?

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<sup>1</sup> These Times, October, 2008

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Episcopal Bishop Jim Kelsey of the Diocese of Northern Michigan wrote the following that could have applied to the disciples who had locked the doors of their room – OR it might apply to us;

*“This is something that I have found to be true without exception: that when we, any of us, focus on things in our lives that are passing away,*

*we get scared,*

*we get anxious,*

*we get depressed,*

*we lose hope;*

*and when we focus on things that are being birthed and are coming newly into creation,*

*we get excited,*

*we get imaginative,*

*we get optimistic,*

*we feel drawn closer to one another,*

*we feel as if we have meaning and purpose in life, and we have joy ...*

*We can be frightened and resistant to it (change) or we can embrace it as a tool to transform us.”<sup>2</sup>*

In other words, God has given us a choice. We can be anxious and afraid, or we can be hopeful. What life would you rather choose?

HOPE is a choice. The world doesn't have to be this way – and HOPE can change the way things are. Our Moderator, Mardi Tindal, says that;

***“God intends something better for the world than anything governments and market places can provide.”<sup>3</sup>***

Governments and marketplaces work on a system that encourages each individual to collect as many dollars as we can, by whatever means we can – “legally” of course, and to collect these dollars whenever we can.

Jesus teaches us that we are all children of God; all of us are loved and we are to use the gifts that we have for the benefit of all, especially for those who are on the margins of society. We hope for a better world for everyone – not just ourselves. We all came into this world with nothing - nothing - in the words of Farley Mowat, we are all “born naked. We all leave with nothing- and there is plenty here for all. Was that not illustrated when 5000 hungry people were fed, or when Jesus challenged a rich young ruler to distribute his wealth among the poor?

Jim Wallis spoke in Orangeville Ontario on May 28, 2005. In his address to Toronto Conference Rev. Wallis said:

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<sup>2</sup> The Alban Institute weekly newsletter, April 5, 2010, “Ministry of the Baptized”

<sup>3</sup> Advent 2008 communication from Five Oaks

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***“Hope is a decision. It is a choice we make because of faith.  
And FAITH is believing in spite of the evidence.”<sup>4</sup>***

All at once Jesus appears among us in the room, and he says the most ordinary thing;  
***“Peace be with you.”<sup>5</sup>***

For Jesus, this wasn't a new saying – he said it frequently and it was a common greeting of the day – something like people today say;

**How's it goin, eh?”**

For Jesus though, this wasn't just a salutation – it was the fulfillment of a promise. The last time that they were together before his crucifixion Jesus had told the disciples that, regardless of what they were threatened with in this world, - even a lack of security - they would share in his peace. Now he had come back to fulfill that promise.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit Jesus breathed his life and mission into the group gathered in that room. **As God has sent me – *now I send YOU!*<sup>6</sup>**

Jesus invites us out of those places where we're hiding and into the goodness of the world that God created. Jesus invites us to follow in his way to love and serve others. As **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.** put it:

***“Life's most persistent and urgent question is,  
“What are you doing for others?””***

**Lance Secretan**, a business leader and author, puts it this way:

*“Being committed to serving others is a virtuous practice because it is nearly always a spiritual one, and the most profitable practice in the long run.”<sup>7</sup>*

For Easter people like us, there is a phrase that is empowering. It is, “Practice Resurrection”. It comes from a poem by eco-theologian, **Wendell Berry**. The poem is called: “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front”<sup>8</sup>

In the poem the farmer warns against the love of the quick profit and a life which makes a person **afraid** to know your neighbours, and **afraid** to die. Instead, the mad farmer calls us to do something every day that doesn't compute. Love God; Love God's world; and finally, **“practice resurrection.”**

***“Peace to you. Just as God sent me, so I send you.”<sup>9</sup>***

Not all of us will have the effect of a Mother Theresa, Desmond Tutu, or some of the other saints of today. At the same time, God has come in Jesus to show us that a conversation with a Samaritan woman; mealtimes with the marginalized; and journeys

<sup>4</sup> James Wallis, speaking at the Annual Meeting of Toronto Conference, May 28, 2005

<sup>5</sup> John 20:19

<sup>6</sup> John 20:21

<sup>7</sup> Lance Secretan, Inspire – What great leaders do, page 149

<sup>8</sup> This is a poem in Berry's 1973 book, The Country of Marriage

<sup>9</sup> John 20: 21

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with tax collectors and sinners are remembered 2000 years later as God's way to live life and bring HOPE to a world where people live behind locked doors. **We are being SENT into God's world, out of our locked upper rooms, to live the way of Jesus!**

God's earthly journey in the person of Jesus began in a manger – and ended on a cross. Being an Easter people we know that the cross was not the end.

Hope's journey begins in our hearts when we make choices **to bring freedom to the locked rooms of God's world.** That's when God is with us as we break out of our self-imposed upper rooms and we participate in making all things new.

More Voices # 115 – Behold, Behold, I Make All Things New

**Questions for reflection:**

- Have you ever gone to your room and locked the door? Why?
- Jesus says, "As God has sent me, I am sending you." (John 20:21) What is it that you feel Jesus is asking you to do in your life?

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### Prayers for God's Family and Creation

God, you are Holy Mystery, beyond complete knowledge, and above wordy, human descriptions. Some of us call you;  
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer;  
Mother, Friend and Comforter;  
Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love.  
Yet, in love, you seek relationship.

We too seek relationship; with each other, with family and friends; with neighbours; and with the world we live in, and on.

We give you thanks that the fullness of life includes moments of unexpected inspiration, and courage discovered to get us through those trying times,  
It includes experiences of springtime beauty, discoveries of truth, and the essential goodness of humanity.

We give you thanks for the gift of Easter;  
A gift that is beyond our imaginations; beyond our limited powers of reason.

We know about the powers of fear, and greed, and anxiety, of brutality, and certainty of conviction. They keep us trapped and locked in our personal spaces.

We know the stories of those who have difficulty of living on Ontario Works and Employment Insurance;  
Those who cannot make ends meet on miniscule minimum wages,  
We know the stories of those who are suffering from broken hips, and with cancer;  
Those whose life is fading away because of diabetes, or pulmonary hypertension  
Our hearts go out to the people of Poland, and to the Fawcett family.

And still, you choose to appear among us unexpectedly.  
You say, Fear not, it is I, and we are comforted.  
You say, go in peace, and we feel motivated.  
You say justice, and our hearts and hands are moved to act.  
Your Spirit comes among us and hears our prayers of deepest longing,  
And we are transformed.

Hear our prayers, Life-giving God;  
Touch the lives of Tristan, Ethan, Mya and Naomi  
So that they may place their hope in you, and find that through your love and compassion, their lives may be filled with meaning.

Quiet

Grateful for your loving actions God, we cannot keep from singing: