

Second Sunday of Easter

SHUCKERED OR SUCCOURED?

John 20:19-31

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Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

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." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples,

which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

DIAGNOSIS: Majorly Shuckered

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Suckers*

It's no fun being made a sucker, and most likely, that's how the disciples felt that first day of the week huddled in a house behind bolted doors. Jesus had let them down, big-time. Seemingly, they had been duped into believing that Jesus could fix their problems (even the problems of the whole world!), and now, they would have to pay the price for their foolishness. They'd have to go into hiding lest what happened to Jesus might happen to them (v. 19). One thing's for sure: nothing had changed. The powers that ruled still ruled! That was brutally clear.

After we've come through Holy Week, we too may wonder, Are we suckers? Sometimes we pay an awfully high price for following Jesus. When we try to be humble and forgiving, we're laughed at and taken advantage of. And, in spite of the celebration, when we examine our lives we notice that nothing's really changed. Powerful forces keep beating us down, tempting us to reconsider self-preservation and self-promotion.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Shuckered*

What the disciples had been convinced of was that Jesus was in charge of the system, and that he was going to fix things. But recent events had proved that Jesus wouldn't fix the system; It had fixed him! Had they been shuckered? The fact that they're huddled behind locked doors betrays their doubt about Jesus and their consequent fearfulness. (The phrase "for fear of the Jews"

is repeated three times.) Thomas simply verbalizes their disbelief when he declares “unless I see....I will not believe” (v. 25)! Little did they, little do we, understand that the primary arena for which Jesus’ “fixing” is needed is within their/our hearts! Not only do those hearts not trust Jesus/God, they still deeply trust the old system (what we might call the Law). In fact, they/we are innately fixated on the Law – how else can we ensure that the universe revolve around us?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : Shucked

Fear-filled disciples (of every age) imprisoned behind locked doors are in for the shock of their lives: their doors get locked from the outside-by God. Talk about paying a price! Apparently, God gives non-trusters their way, not insisting that he be their god and lord; He respects their choices, and sees that their wishes are carried out. To wit, when we choose the Law, God implements it-all the way to its terrifying conclusion.

PROGNOSIS: Divinely Succoured

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Astonishing Succour

Succour for the world’s shucked arrives unexpectedly Easter morning with an earth-shattering blaze of majestic power: Jesus walks out of his tomb (20:6-16), raised by Almighty God. Yes, indeed, this is the same Jesus who had just been shucked onto a garbage heap days earlier, brutally executed on a cross, apparently abandoned by God, locked up in hell; but he emerges alive and well, albeit bearing the scars of his torture. With that incredulous tour de force, God the Father knocks out all the “powers” arraigned against his Son and, correspondingly, also against locked-up, locked-in disciples. Chief among those defeated powers is the Law with its purpose to kill. This is followed by a stunning display of mercy when Jesus, having just escaped the walls of hell, enters the locked-in, locked-up

disciples' hell and declares "peace" (vv. 19 & 26). He could just as easily have said, I forgive you, or, I've come to unlock your doors and get you out!

Step 5: Advance Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Mercifully Succoured*

Very likely, Thomas felt a sense of guilt over his blatant doubt and unbelief, so he must have marveled at the love and forgiveness that radiated from Jesus' gentle words, "touch my wounds" (v. 27). In a flash, Thomas connected Jesus' wounds with those sweet words of forgiveness and understood that all that had happened to Jesus had been for him! So he falls down and confesses, "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28). This joyful reaction/action is repeated regularly by disciples of every generation, as we too "believe" when we "see" with our ears the wounds born for us! Like the disciples we rejoice (v. 20). But Jesus doesn't stop with his forgiving "peace" declaration, he follows it up by breathing his breath, his own Spirit, into the disciples (v. 22).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Grateful Succourers*

When Jesus performs this re-animation, the disciples become Jesus' twins. (Interesting, that Thomas was called a twin, v. 24.) Animated by his Spirit, disciples set out to be and do what Jesus had just done-namely, to seek out and bring succour to the world's shucked, locked-up hell-sufferers. How? As with Thomas, by pointing to Jesus' wounds and "passing the peace," forgiving sins (v. 23). True, the powers that rule still (apparently) rule, but they've lost their clout to "lord" it over these disciples. In fact, even when these disciples wind up on a cross, they are remarkably fearless, trusting that they have "life in his name" (v. 31).