

# Second Sunday of Easter

**THOMAS, OUR TWIN**

**John 20:19-31**

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**Analysis by Steven C. Kuhl**

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.

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Locked Up**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Locked Up = Fortress Mentality*

As the disciples viewed the event of Jesus' execution, all bets on him as being the hoped-for liberating messiah were now off. They apparently cast their lot with the wrong would-be messiah. Problem is, the apparent "winners" in this whole affair—the Jews, as John calls them, those religious folks who cast their lot with the slavery of the Roman political (dare we say, patriotic?) status quo, the civil gods—were not satisfied with having gotten ridden of Jesus. They were intent on getting rid of all who placed their bets on him as well. The result? The disciples now retreat into a fortress mentality—by literally going into hiding, locking themselves up in a secluded room, as though that were the only hope of survival (v. 19). How tempting for disciples (then as well as now) to lock themselves up, out of view of the world, when their identification with Jesus meets the same fate as Jesus.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *Locked Up = Fear Mentality*

Of course, the inward condition that corresponds to this outward "fortress mentality" is fear (v. 19). Fear, in this case, signals who is holding captive the disciples' hearts and minds. It is "the Jews," those religious folks who also live in fear—not true fear of the living God (ultimately the only true kind of fear there is), but fear of the civil gods, with whom they have struck a deal for the time being. Presumably, the disciples may at this point want to opt into that deal as well.

But it seems that the Jews won't let them. They need to make an example of the disciples to demonstrate their proper fear to the civil gods. How tempting it is for disciples (then as now) to live in such a fear mentality.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : Locked Up = Entombment**

Of course, the theological condition (the situation before God) that this outward and inward condition signals is death, death at the hands of the living God. In the last analysis, it is not the Jews, the political authorities or the civil gods that are feared, but God in God's lawful righteousness. Although the "fortress" and the "fear" mentalities seem for a time to serve as security to those who live in them, in truth they are nothing other than the stuff out of which tombs are made. They ensure that death is inevitable and final, because of sin and God's judgment upon it (3:17-21, 36). What tombs accomplish is they keep the dead from contaminating the living. They are not places of security, but of eternal death. How tempting it is for disciples (then and now) confuse the tomb with security.

## **PROGNOSIS: Opened Up**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Opened Up = Passing Through**

What has not been mentioned thus far is that the disciples found themselves in this locked-up situation even after Mary Magdalene had told them that Christ had risen (20:18). Even though they were told that the Jews, political authorities, civil gods, and death itself could not lock him up and put him away, as of yet, that new fact, had no impact on their personal entombment. But that was soon to change. Jesus enters into their locked-up condition announcing a "peace" (v. 19) that dispels all fear; he shows them his hands and side (v. 20) as his death-defying life marks. It is true: The crucified one is raised and raised not to

bring judgment but salvation (3:17). Amazingly, while those locked doors might keep out the Jews, they cannot keep Jesus out. He now is in the world in such a way that nothing can bar him—not the keepers of civil religion, not the civil gods, not even God's own death sentence for sin, a sentence he bore for the sake of his disciples. The Word is out and being proclaimed! Christ passes through locked-up doors as though they don't even exist. How liberating that must have look to anyone who has eyes to see, then as now!

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Opened Up = Believing***

In a sense, what Jesus has done so far is nothing more than what Mary Magdalene had done. He announced that he has been raised. The more he now does is breathe on them the Holy Spirit (v. 22). What the Holy Spirit does, is bring the outward news of Christ's resurrection and peace into the inward reaches of his disciples locked up, fear-laden hearts. That is he transforms fear to faith—not only the “fear of the Jews,” not only the fear of the civil gods and political authorities, but the very fear of God that comes with God's lawful condemnation of sin (3:17). Faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit opening the hearts of sinful disciples to the pacifying message of the forgiveness of sins (v. 23) won through the death and resurrection Jesus Christ. How liberating it must be for disciples, then and now, to believe that in Christ their sins are forgiven and they have peace with God.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Opened Up = Proclaiming the Crucified and Risen One to the World.***

The outward manifestation of the disciples' inward faith is that they are now authorized to share the message of the resurrection (and its consequent peace and forgiveness) to the sinful world. And what better place to begin than with their friend, Thomas, who was not present when Jesus physically appeared (v. 24)? Of

course, the disciples testimony to Thomas is met with skepticism. He will not believe unless he sees ... (v. 25). The next week when the disciples are gathered together, (could this be an allusion to the regular Sunday gathering where Jesus is proclaimed?), Jesus appears and addresses Thomas directly. In the course of the encounter Thomas believes. But all this happens with purpose: Thomas' experience is not meant to be understood as normative, but illustrative. Therefore, Thomas is called the "the Twin" for good reason (v. 24). And whose twin is he? Answer: your twin, my twin, the twin of all who have not seen and yet believe (v. 29). As his twin, we "see" the risen Lord only through his eye-witness testimony. Accordingly, it is not seeing the raised Jesus with the eyes that opens up our hearts to faith and our mouths to witness. Rather, it is through hearing and speaking that is accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit that opens up hearts to faith and mouths to witness. That's important for all believers to remember. It is the message that St. John taught us earlier in the account of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus (3:1-15). We simply proclaim the risen Christ who has entered our hearts by the power of the Spirit, trusting that that same Spirit will open whoever's heart she chooses through the testimony of the likes of Thomas and his twins. How liberating that is for disciples, then as now, who live in a skeptical world. No illusions about how locked-up people can be—no doubt about how opening-up the Word and Spirit can be.