

Jesus Enters the Locked Room

12 April 2026, 2nd Sunday of Easter (Low Sunday): Reflection on John 20:19-31

-Tristan Sullivan-Vaughan

It can be very easy on reading John's gospel to assume that we would have believed straight away, would have known better. But the reality is that most of us would probably have acted the same way the disciples do in the story. We'd have hidden ourselves away in fear of the authorities, not wanting to stick our heads above the parapet.

While Mary comes forward with her story of Christ risen from the dead, we are told that Peter and the disciple whom Christ loved ran to the tomb, saw the grave clothes and believed... but they don't seem to have known what to do next and it seems likely that the others weren't so convinced.

For how many of you has everything gone back to normal after Easter? More or less normal at any rate? We get caught up in the hope and beauty of the story, but then the real world intervenes and we go back to our 9-5 job and all the other responsibilities of life.

The situation isn't far from that for the first disciples after that first Easter. There are rumours Christ has risen, and those probably seem exciting if not necessarily credible. If they were true, then what did they mean? None of this was clear and there was a very real threat from the Roman authorities to go along with them.

So, the disciples did what most people would do – they hid. They locked the door to the place they were staying and hid, hoping the storm would blow over.

Jesus entered the locked room without the good manners to knock. Jesus comes and stands amongst them, and the disciples were overjoyed to meet Christ... and once he is gone... they go right back to what they were doing before. They close the door, lock it and go back to hiding. One of them, Thomas, wasn't there and he doesn't believe their testimony that Christ came amongst them... though really... would you? They're saying he did, but it doesn't seem to have had any effect on how the disciples are living.

But Jesus isn't about to leave one of his people out. The gospel tells us that a week later the disciples were still hanging around in the house with the doors locked when Jesus appears again. Jesus enters the locked room, circumventing all their security measures. This time Thomas is present, and Jesus provides the proof that Thomas had asked for, even though Thomas protests that he doesn't need the evidence anymore.

Thomas traditionally gets a bit of a bad rap for his demands for evidence. I think this can be a little unfair, considering his only evidence prior to encountering Christ are the feverish stories of other disciples. Thomas didn't have tradition and testimony bound up and labelled as scripture – just what his friends had told him. And what they told him wasn't possible, wasn't explainable and didn't make sense. But I don't want to focus too much on that. Rather I would like to look at the way Jesus approaches the disciples and the way in which they respond.

In both stories in John, Jesus enters the locked room, breaking through the barriers that the disciples have set up to keep others out. Jesus speaks to them, encourages them and then leaves again. The disciples, however, don't seem all that impressed. In the same way that the disciples fall back into a normal routine and lock the door for fear of the authorities. We don't hear from John what happens after Jesus' second visit, but if we assume it's an earlier part of the story to Luke's Pentecost narrative, the disciples went back to locking themselves in rooms for fear of the authorities. It's only on Pentecost that they actually come out from their safe, locked rooms and become the Church in the world.

There is a pattern here. Jesus breaks in. The moment is amazing and potentially life changing, but then the disciples go back to their old, safe, familiar ways.

I don't know if you've ever been skiing? Have you been on a beginner's slope and tried to use the tow bar. At your feet there will be grooves cut into the snow by all the hundreds of people who went up the rope before you, over and over. It's extremely difficult to place your feet outside of those ruts.

So, it was for the disciples and so, I would like to suggest, it can be for us as well.

As the Church we exist in a constant state of being moulded by God. We encounter God in countless ways throughout our lives. Some dramatic, some very every day.

We are on a constant journey of growth in which we are slowly being transformed towards the image of Christ. Christ is constantly entering into our locked rooms, encouraging us out into the world. Easter, for me at least, is often a time when I reassess my spiritual life and make a few resolutions for the year to come. Does that feel familiar?

Christ is entering in.

But, when the high of the easter season dies down, do we open the door and step outside into the big wide world, or do we, gradually fall back into the pattern that we were trying to break out of? Do we lock the doors again and stay inside? Are there hardships or judgments we are afraid of? Or does life just take over?

Maybe, in this Easter season we can look at where Christ is entering into our lives right now. We can look at what changes we are being called to make and pray for the strength to make them. How can we help our friends and neighbours in the pews to transform towards the image of Christ? Can we, as a community, be a place, where the door is never locked and we constantly step out into the world to do God's will.

If I may, I would like to close with a version of a prayer originally written by Reinhold Niebuhr. I think you will be familiar with the first few lines...

God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change
the courage to change the things I can
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time,
enjoying one moment at a time.
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace.
Taking, as God did, the sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it.
Trusting that God will make all things right
if I surrender to God's will;
that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
and supremely happy with God forever.