

"Back into the Tomb"

John 20:19-31

April 15, 2007

A little boy asked his mother where he came from, and also where she had come from as a baby. His mother gave him a tall tale about a beautiful white-feathered stork. The boy asked his grandmother the same question and received a variation on the bird story. Outside to his playmate he said, "You know, there hasn't been a normal birth in our family for three generations." Hold on to that thought for a moment.

There are a lot of ways that we could approach today's Gospel on this Sunday after Easter. It is interesting to note that John's Gospel is the only one that mentions this incident that has left poor Thomas labeled for all of time with the tag 'the doubter'. Even though it is the only mention of this event, we pull it out every year on the Sunday after Easter almost as though the church wants to say, 'it's OK to doubt - the story of Christ's resurrection is incredible - so if you doubt it, don't be surprised.'

Doubts are normal when it comes to things that are as amazing as the resurrection of Christ. In fact, I can't think of anything that would be more logical to doubt - it is simply the most incredible thing that I can imagine. Still, I do not want to talk about Thomas or doubt today. I think we have talked that aspect of this story to death [so to speak]. In fact it is a little irritating to see Thomas looked down upon as the doubter when in fact Thomas is portrayed as the one who not only makes the boldest confession of faith of any of the disciples when He recognized Jesus as both his "Lord and God" but he was also the one who was 'out and about' in his world when everyone else seems to have continued to hid behind closed doors.

Did you ever really think about the situation into which the risen Christ steps in this event. The disciples are continuing to hide. From the moment of Jesus' arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, those disciples have been hiding, afraid of what might happen to them. Faithful disciples scattered as Jesus was led away. Bold believers denied knowing Jesus for fear for their lives. And now they hid together [perhaps in that 'upper room' where they had shared the 'last supper' with Jesus]. Mary had brought the news of the empty tomb to them but they were afraid and continued to huddle together behind locked doors in fear and confusion.

Have you ever thought about how much like a tomb that room had become. They were locked away - unable to live their lives because of fear, discouragement, doubts and questions. We don't know where Thomas was at the time Jesus arrived - I

always find myself imagining that he had just run to the store for a few groceries. We don't know. What we do know is that the rest were there - locked away. And Jesus entered.

To me it is amazing to picture Jesus - dead and buried behind a huge stone door. And then He simply rose and left. I believe that the only reason the stone was rolled away and the tomb open was because the followers of Jesus, beginning with Mary and the other women that came to the tomb could become the first witnesses. Jesus does not need an open door to leave the tomb - nor does He need an open door to enter a closed tomb. And, I believe that is really the most important aspect of this Gospel text. Jesus simple comes - He enters into fear filled rooms behind closed doors. And there He offers peace and a new birth - a resurrection, if you will.

In their tomb of fear and depression, the disciples were dead in many ways. But Jesus came to give them life - not the normal birth but a totally different kind of rebirth.

I know that every one of you sitting here today have been through the normal kind of birth. Do you need a resurrection? Do you need that recreation where the risen Jesus enters in and breaths life into you? Where that heavenly white dove - the Holy Spirit comes to unlock the doors behind which you hide?

I suspect that there can be many reasons for us closing the doors of life behind us. Fears abound in our world. Depression and discouragement are often close companions. I read an interesting article that talked about discouragement. It said:

"Discouragement is dissatisfaction with the past, distaste for the present, and distrust of the future. It is ingratitude for the blessings of yesterday, indifference to the opportunities of today, and insecurity regarding strength for tomorrow. It is unawareness of the presence of beauty, unconcern for the needs of our fellow man, and unbelief in the promises of old. It is impatience with time, immaturity of thought, and impoliteness to God." Are you locked behind closed doors?

The fact is that the reason for Christ's resurrection from the dead was not to prove the power of God - it was not to show that Jesus could get out from behind the stone over His tomb's entrance. The reason for His resurrection was so that He could enter our tombs and give us life. We understand that to mean a resurrection of the body after death [and it does mean that]. But, also, it means giving us all a non-conventional birth in the dark days of our earthly existence.

If the closed doors of the room in which the disciples hid can remind us of the tomb of Jesus - then Jesus breathing on the disciples should remind us of the creation story in Genesis. There in the beginning, God formed us in His image and then stooped down to that lifeless creation and breathed life

into them. Often in our lifeless state we need God to breath life into us again. And we are set free - given life - showered with peace.

AMEN