

“The Rest of the Story”  
John 20:19-31  
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Just a week ago many of us were sitting here, some even in the same pew, celebrating Easter. A week has slipped by and now we have returned to hear the rest of the Easter story. The rest of the Easter story? Yes, the part that includes you and me. How has your Easter week been? Just another week at work, a time to shovel one more round of snow, the opportunity to support Uncle Sam with one more check, or a break from routines to applaud and tear up over Susan Boyle’s singing on UTube? All in all most of us have fallen back into our predictable patterns of living, even as we endeavor to live in the light and promise of the resurrection.

We have experienced our Easter week differently than did the disciples. By the time of their Easter Sunday, they existed in a state of supreme fear, anguish and disbelief. So much had happened so fast. From Palm Sunday onward, events had just rolled one into another, with Jesus being arrested in Gethsemane hours after the Last Supper had occurred. Then came the questioning of Jesus, the flogging and ridicule, the crucifixion and the weeping, and the descent into death and silence. No wonder the disciples had sought refuge behind locked doors. They were traumatized. Last Sunday Pastor Pederson spoke about Jesus preceding us into whatever situation awaits us. And here we have it: even with the door closed, Jesus came and stood among his beloved disciples. He came to offer his “peace”. He breathed the Holy Spirit on them. Then the second Sunday of Easter, today. Jesus returns through the shut door to converse with Thomas, w Thomas doubted Jesus’ Easter day appearance as the other disciples had recounted it to him. Out of concern and love for Thomas, Jesus returned so that he might believe. This is the rest of the Easter story, the part that includes you and me. While we can not literally see the nail marks as Thomas did, we are now invited to see with our hearts.

During Lent a group of us gathered weekly to share our reflections from reading daily devotions in *Open the Door*, a book by Joyce Rupp. Our hope was that each of us would grow in our spirituality, in our relationship with God. We yearned to know God’s presence in our busy lives, to discover more meaningful ways of serving him, to become more vulnerable to his will. Using a door as the metaphor for the state of our relationship with God, we shared descriptions of our doors. They ranged from steel and wooden doors to beaded, screen and Dutch doors. Mavis Tell arrived with a picture of Japanese doors to share with us. I can not adequately convey to you the excitement that many of us experienced as we shared the riches of our Lenten daily discipline. Not only did we grow closer to god, but also to one another as we learned of our many spiritual journeys. At the last class we again shared what our doors now looked like. Many steel and

wooden doors had been replaced by dutch doors. Generally our doors became more transparent. We were daring to move closer to God. We were finding the courage to relate more intimately with our Lord. Yes, we were addressing some of our own fears. Our barricaded doors were gently giving way to a vibrant, open space. As Thomas saw with new eyes so did we.

P.S. does not only stand for a post script on a letter. Rather P.S. at Augustana today refers to “passionate spirituality”. Those of us who have attended events, sponsored by our Strategic Planning Committee, are familiar with this phrase. In the months to come, you will hear much more about passionate spirituality. It is the effort to make God very alive within this congregation and out in the surrounding community. You will have ample opportunity to explore ways in which both individually and as a community we can engage in passionate spirituality.

Recently Betty Ridgeway, a 75 year old Denver resident who sports a portable oxygen tank, shared a poignant story with 50 gathered women. In February Betty was driving south on Quebec towards Yale. She happened to notice a young boy, coatless and barefoot on the nearby sidewalk on this wintry day. Shocked and concerned, she pulled over her car to near where the lad was and out she got to befriend the child. He explained that while his parents were arguing, he decided to run away from home. Compassionately she listened and successfully offered the 4 year old boy a ride back home. His parents were relieved to have him returned. This is passionate spirituality where we dare to act because of what we believe. We are committed to making a difference in the name of our risen Lord.

In the four gospels we only have brief snippets of information about Thomas, who was called the twin. He was a deeply loyal disciple, often described as a courageous pessimist. Thomas sustained the courage of his convictions and stuck with Jesus through thick and thin. He just could not accept secondhand the disciples exclaiming, “we have seen the Lord.” He desired evidence. When Jesus returned to the second time and challenged Thomas to touch his wounds, Thomas exclaimed in just seeing, “My Lord and my God”. Yes, the door of his heart was swung open to the rest of reality, as Parker Palmer describes it. In this resurrection appearance, Thomas was able to see Jesus anew and different. Courageous skeptic that he was, he was able to move beyond his own presumptions. Thomas let go of his own stubborn bias. He may have been the late bloomer among the disciples; slow to accept the new reality. When he did grasp it, with lightning speed and enthusiasm he emphatically believed in the resurrected Christ. Why? Because Jesus generously offered himself. Jesus gives Thomas what he needs to have faith. He gives us what we need to have faith. This is why we are the rest of the Easter story. Jesus meets us where we are today, with our fears, anxieties, infirmities and needs. He urges us to trust him, to have the courage to open our heart’s door to him. It may not be easy but he is waiting for us. We will never be alone. What might happen as we do

this? I can't tell you, but I know that we will be safe in the Lord's hands. St. John of the Cross describes it this way:

Forever at his door  
I gave my heart and soul. My fortune too.  
I've no flock any more,  
No other work in view.  
My occupation: Love. It's all I do.

This week as we continue in the stillness and the beauty of the resurrection sunrise, may we awaken to our own new life in Christ. "My Lord and my God" in you I believe with my whole heart!