

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service and in particular with the Congregational Bible passage.

Week beginning Sunday 23 April **Closed doors**

Pray Pray that we would be ready to let Jesus into our lives and be open to him making changes. Sometimes we need to be ready to be surprised.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). John 20:19-31.

Background The initial appearances had taken place – Mary had met with Jesus but the bulk of the disciples were living in fear of the authorities and were behind locked doors. I don't think we ought to be too hard on them for this, nor indeed on Thomas for the stance he takes but it does remind us that Jesus deals with us where we are – with our fears and doubts and, through his intervention, by his grace and with the power of the Spirit transforms the situation. Is it too much to suggest that he can do the same for us and transform our situations?

Possible questions/points to consider

1. Try to put yourself in the position of the disciples after Jesus' crucifixion. How would you be feeling? What thoughts would be running through your mind? How would you view the future? Where would you be spiritually? Practically?
2. Perfect love casts out fear. That may well be so but where does fear come in to our lives as Christians living in the uncertain world of the 21st century? There is no doubt that the disciples way back then were scared stiff – and that in spite of all the teaching they had had. Surely Christians are still allowed to be scared. How do the promises Jesus has made temper our fear, set it in context? How do we ensure that we hold on to his promises when things are really tough for us?
3. Locking doors for security is a sensible and prudent measure to take. I remember the first time my aunt put a lock on her front door. Prior to that folks could (and did) wander in. I remember us making a cup of tea, waiting a while for her and leaving a note to say we had been. Why do people not do that anymore? But we don't only physically close doors – we put up mental and emotional shutters too. Why do we shut other people out? Why do we shut God out? What needs to happen in order for us to be more open to others? to God? Trust has a lot to do with it – but so does the ground for our trust. How do you respond to that?
4. Thomas has gone down in history as the archetype of the doubter – which is a shame really as he is more than ready to come round to trusting Jesus. (He didn't in fact need to put his hand in Jesus' side). Given that we all have doubts it would probably be wise for us to be restrained in our criticisms of Thomas! Some have said that there are two kinds of doubt – 1) the kind that questions with a view to getting an answer from God – doubt heading towards faith and 2) the kind that asks questions of God with a view to catching him out – doubt heading away from faith. What you think of that? How do your doubts (now or in the past) fit into those categories?
5. Jesus is forever trying to deepen our faith and deal with our fears, doubts, concerns, reservations – how do we remain open to his approaches? Are we open enough with him – open enough with one another – to share these so that they can be dealt with? How might we be more open, to help and be helped?

Prayer Thank you for your readiness to help us believe, to deal with our honest doubts, to be encouraging as well as challenging. Thank you that Thomas was frank about his concerns, thank you that you were gentle with him. Help us to be more open with you and to reap the benefits of your blessing that we might be a blessing to others. Amen.