

John 20:19-31

Come Holy Spirit come.

 Come as the FIRE and burn,
 come as the WIND and cleanse,
 come as the LIGHT and illumine.

Locked Upper Room

Our readings this morning from John and Acts give me tremendous Joy as I think of what we are promised and what we can become.

How often are we like those in the “Locked Upper Room”?

We often find ourselves shut off from others for any number of reasons: physical, mental, emotional. **WE** keep the door locked because we think we are in control and can.

However, Jesus, in all His aspects, is always able to get passed the locked Door, passed the hurdles and obstacles **WE** create to find us.

Why do we shut ourselves off from others?

Although we live in COMMUNITY and our strongest bonds are forged in COMMUNITY, we far too easily and far too often allow ourselves to create separation and isolation. The more we feel we must address issues on our own, the more isolated we become.

Look how successful support groups are. Weight Watchers is an international company because people who want to lose weight need the support of others. Prayer groups, and this is what we will shortly become, are called together to pray for the ill or those needing help, to provide a unified voice asking God for aid and support of those in and out of our COMMUNITY.

I began my “journey” three years ago. The first year, the most meaningful part was practicing Morning Prayer daily.

WHY?

Because our Deacon group made the commitment that we would do so every morning between 6-7. Eight people, across the state, united in prayer and reflection on God’s word. This strengthened all of us.

Why is it then, knowing of the power to be found in COMMUNITY, that it is often SO hard for us to allow the COMMUNITY to help us ... to ask for help. People with illnesses want to keep them secret or not ask for help. For addicts, and my friends WE ARE ALL ADDICTS, the first step is ALWAYS to “find the bottom.”

WHY?

Because then we give up our aloneness, our fear, our embarrassment, our self-confidence, our self-loathing. We realize that our strength is in our caring, understanding COMMUNITY.

ELIZABETH

Two months ago, I was chatting with one of the members of our priestly formation group. She told me that she had “tweaked” her right knee, had seen a physician, and was trying to deal with her knee with exercises she had been given and was doing so ON HER OWN.

At last month’s gathering, on Saturday morning, her knee locked up. She was completely dependent upon her COMMUNITY for help, support, movement. 24 hours later, after extreme pain, being in a wheelchair, being completely dependent on her COMMUNITY for everything, her knee “popped” and suddenly, she had little, if any pain, and could walk.

She told us that she had learned what it was like to be dependent. She also told us that she discovered the true power and love in COMMUNITY and how everyone’s care and love and prayers surrounded her.

She also discovered herself praying to God **IN THANKS** for the experience because it had forced her to remove EGO (“I can handle this.” “I can do this own my own.”) and to be truly open to God’s love and presence.

God / Jesus had found a way into her Locked Upper Room.

Jesus does this in John’s Gospel.

The women and men are terrified of the outside world. Jewish officials hunting for them, the Romans maybe as well. And, their Lord and Master, who they had followed for three years, into and out of trouble, who had shown them the fearlessness of Faith was dead, flogged and crucified in the most terrible, public way.

Their COMMUNITY was now defined by the dozen or so of them in that Locked Upper Room.

Into this COMMUNITY of separation and fear, uncertainty and chaos, comes Jesus. Not ONCE but TWICE.

The first time he brings HOPE for the present and the future. He answers their most personal and emotional fears. He strengthens and encourages that small COMMUNITY.

The SECOND TIME, he comes back, into that Locked Room, past the walls and locked door to address the one, final skeptical question of Thomas: “Until I see ... I won’t believe.”

Here, Jesus says,

SEE me,

FEEL my wounds,

TRUST that I am risen and that I will always be with you.

That through my LOVE you, also, will be able to break free of these walls and doors.

Your COMMUNITY will be in the world helping others break out of their Locked Upper Rooms, just as I am doing for you.

In our lives, we ALL often find ourselves in our personal and COMMUNITY Locked Upper Rooms. We may be afraid to switch jobs, we may be surrounded by walls of “the perception of others”, we may be held prisoner by economics or substance abuse or material desires. We most often put ourselves in the Locked Upper Room of “otherness.”

“THEY are different from me (and remember, there are other looking at me the same way) so why should I attempt to know them, to help them get beyond their Locked Upper Rooms?”

Jesus is relentless, he returns time and time again through our walls and locked doors. He enters our Locked Upper Rooms to give us the courage to move OUT, to unlock our doors, to move into the sun and fresh air of God’s world. (Can you imagine what that original Locked Upper Room must have smelled like?!)

**Jesus’ presence in that Locked Upper Room reminds us that we are never alone,
can never be alone, and that
through his love and God’s grace
we can and are called to help others break free of their Locked Upper Rooms.**

AMEN