

Sunday 31st May

Read John 20.19-23

Reflection

Faith Darch (Reader)

“The doors of the house were locked for fear of the Jews” (v19).

We have all been experiencing (and some of us still are) being 'locked' in 'for fear' – fear of the coronavirus, fear for other people, if not for our own well-being. And for many, that fear has been compounded by financial fear: will my business survive? Will I have a job to go back to? How will I pay the rent or mortgage? How will my children's or grandchildren's education and future be affected?

These are all genuine reasons for concern at least and, for some, reason to fear for the future. And the disciples had (or believed they had) reason to fear, too. Would they, if pursued by the authorities and arrested, be flogged, imprisoned and crucified like Jesus had been? Who wouldn't be afraid at such a prospect?

It seems – to us looking back from a safe distance – that actually the disciples were more afraid than they need to have been. It didn't seem that anyone was bothered about them: deal with the leader and the followers will fall away. Hadn't they indeed done so when Jesus was arrested? Barring Peter, who then got scared and denied Jesus, and John who quietly stood grieving at the cross, none of the disciples showed any courage. Fear ruled. As the wise Gamaliel said to the Jewish council later, if this Jesus movement is not of God, it will just fizzle out. If it *is* of God, do we want to find ourselves opposing God? Just leave these Jesus-disciples alone (Acts 5:34-9).

Ironically, it was when the disciples stopped being afraid and boldly preached the Good News that Jesus was the Messiah and he had risen from the dead, that the arrests and floggings and stoning and persecution started. Then, when they really had good reason to fear, they went ahead and witnessed to Jesus all the more. I'm sure those disciples must have been well aware of the dangers they were facing – after all, Jesus had warned them clearly “beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me and you will be hated by all because of my name” (Mark 13:9,13). Did they lose all fear? I doubt it! But they went ahead anyway. The *difference* was that they were no longer 'locked in' by their fear. This was real courage: to feel the fear and follow Jesus anyway.

What made that difference to the disciples? I think three things. The first was that they *saw* and *knew* that Jesus was alive. The second was that he gave them his peace. The third was “he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'” (John 20:22).

What about us, then? Whether we are still 'locked in' by fear, or whether reasons to fear come to us – as they surely will – in the future, how do we avoid being '*locked in*' by our fears?

We too know that Jesus is alive. That means that he is the Son of God, who loves us and cares for us. And this good shepherd of ours is also King of kings and rules over all things. Secondly, he can and will give us peace if we place our trust in him. It's not always easy to do that; sometimes, though, when we're at the end of our tether and we have nothing and no-one else to turn to, we find that saying, 'Lord, I give all my fear and worry to you, because I can't do anything more and only you can sort things out - please take over, I hand everything over to you' we find that God gives us peace beyond all understanding. And we too are promised his Holy Spirit, to guide us, to counsel us, to give us peace, and to *empower* us – yes, and even give us joy. Our problems aren't solved for us, but with us. We can know strength and peace and joy and we can, despite still having fear and cause for fear, be set free from being 'locked in' by those fears. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.