

Lockdown

Twice in our reading, it is mentioned that the disciples were together and the doors were locked and the reason stated is that it is because of fear. The fear that they faced was very real – their perceived enemy was the opponents of Jesus. They were in hiding and they weren't going to come out unless the circumstances changed.

This morning, I am standing outside Cadder Church Doors and they are locked doors and they are locked because of fear. Our fear is not in the form of persecution from opponents of Jesus. Our fear is the coronavirus and that fear has gripped the nation.

Doors everywhere are locked. Shops, restaurants, pubs, stadiums, churches and just about everything is locked for fear of the spread of the virus. The church of the nativity has only ever locked its doors during the world wars and their doors are locked also!

We wouldn't be human, if we didn't have fear.

Fear is not altogether a bad thing. It can protect us; it can keep us safe.

Imagine, if we had no fear, then we would be liable to hurt ourselves at every step and turn.

But the disciples were paralysed with fear; a fear that locked them in and literally prevented them from going forward.

Lewis Carroll in his classic book *Alice in Wonderland*, writes about the strange things that happened in Alice's life when she fell down the hole chasing the white rabbit. Her world changed and everything became curiuser and curiuser as she encountered a new world; unusual and unfamiliar as it was and she tried to make sense of this world but found it difficult.

To a certain degree, we also have entered a strange world, a world of unfamiliar things – the virus has plunged us down a metaphorical rabbit hole and suddenly we are in a new world.

Alice eventually awoke from her dream – was it true or not – perhaps to a little girl, it would seem to be very true. But our world at the moment, is like a strange dream – every day, it seems to be getting stranger.

The book begins with Alice peeping at her sister's book and asking the question... “and what is the use of a book” thought Alice, “without pictures of conversations” and this opens the door for Lewis Carroll to construct his story of Alice in *Wonderland* – a journey of pictures and conversations with the most bizarre characters, Mad Hatter, Queen of Hearts and The March Hare and more.

Pictures and conversations are what the bible is all about and it's to the picture of the Upper Room, I want to take you for a few moments today.

Imagine how the disciples felt, that now they had entered a strange world; a world so unfamiliar to them. Their charismatic leader had been cruelly taken from them; their dreams had been smashed; their hopes destroyed and now woman are speaking about Resurrection – What emotions they must have felt; the ten disciples, Judas had taken his life, Thomas was nowhere to be seen – the rest huddled together, like frightened birds in the midst of a storm, clinging together for strength.

Then in their midst – from nowhere – the most bizarre and weirdest moment of their lives – Jesus, their Lord and Master appears! The doors were locked, they were surrounded by four walls and yet he appears. Physical walls and doors do not prevent the Spirit of Jesus from entering.

Can you imagine the atmosphere in the room now?

When Jesus shared with them Peace. The first words that Jesus spoke was peace be with you. He could have said, why did you leave, why did you desert me, why did you betray me – but no, that wasn't his style – He is always concerned about the other person. Peace – not just any old peace but shalom peace – wholeness and unified peace – want ting the very best that this world could give them – peace be with you and then he showed them his real wounds – this was no apparition- no ghost – no hallucination, this was the real authentic Jesus, nail prints and all. This was no strange dream like Alice had, this was reality...it was him, without a shadow of a doubt. This was an historical moment. This was a world changing moment.

When for the first time ever, death was nailed to the cross and defeated. Man may have walked on the moon, man has invented the aeroplane and the computer but this event, the resurrection of Jesus is the by far the most wonderful and life changing occurrence in human history.

What was the reaction of the disciples? ” They were now filled with joy”

I bet you they were!

Their hearts would be about to explode, the adrenalin would be running through their veins. Their lives would never be the same again as suddenly the whole atmosphere in the room changed and the room was that filled with fear, now became a room filled with joy.

And just to draw a line underneath the proceedings, Jesus said again, Peace be with you but with this second blessing he adds a challenge. “As the Father, sent me, so I send you!”

This was the beginning of the church – this was the beginning of launching the church into the world and it begins with joy and peace – two basic values for every church to have Joy, Peace and Sending which is mission.

Then there is fourth and fifth element to the church. He breathes the Spirit upon them. The church needs the spirit of Christ – without this we are spiritually dead. We are no better than the disciples locked in their room.

We cannot go forward as a Church without the Spirit of Jesus and so the disciples were empowered and their mission was one of forgiveness. They were sent to forgive people. So, five elements in this first church group... Joy of Christ, Peace of Christ, Spirit of Christ, Mission of Christ and Message of Christ and suddenly the doors of their hearts were opened wide.

The fear factor was evaporating and these 10 disciples were beginning to see things through a new lens and that lens was the Risen Christ and if people want any proof that Jesus rose from the dead, this is it, that he transformed weak, frightened, fearful men into being men of joy and courage that would take the good news of Jesus out into a hostile world and risk everything for him and the church never looked back.

But, before I finish, there is one person who was missing that day and that was Thomas. But Jesus came back especially for Thomas and Thomas was not going to believe unless he experienced it for himself and when Jesus showed him his wound in his side and the nail prints in his hand and invited him to touch them, then Thomas made that great declaration, my Lord and My God.

The doors of their locked room opened wide and the disciples came out to embrace their new world.

Our locked doors here in Scotland will again open and these ancient doors of Cadder will swing open where people can come and encounter the spirit of Jesus that brings joy, peace, forgiveness and mission into the hearts of God's people.

I hope and pray, that as you listen to this sermon today, in your own homes behind locked doors, that you will take great comfort in the fact, that the spirit of Christ is not locked down but He is in your home to bless you and to be near to you.

May you receive his blessing again this morning,

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Amen.