

## ***The Locked Room***

Text: John 20: 19-31

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**“Spontaneous remission is what we call such things.”** Dr. Nurko’s eyes blinked with astonishment as he squinted through tears. His manner and glance were full of humility and grace as he smiled at Annabel and her mother.

He’s a specialist at Children’s Hospital in Boston, a man of significant renown for his expertise in pediatric digestive diseases, in particular, for obstructive motility disorder. Annabel and her mother Christie became his patients as they searched the vast medical world for someone, *anyone*, who could help them.

They came all the way from Texas, their story filled with despair and illness, healing and hope. It’s a true story with dead ends and open doors; with faith lost and regained; with all of the twists and turns of a young family and their ride through the maze of medical care; with months of airplanes and medication, hospitalizations and disappointment, and with the eventual advice from Dr. Nurko, “Best to spend as much quality time with her as you can.”

Until. Until by various chain of circumstance, or maybe providence, Annabel climbed a cottonwood tree back home in their side-yard at the daring of her sister. It was hollowed and rotted. A branch broke and she fell into the tree plunging headfirst. Miraculously, the impact to her head jarred something in her brain and the disease disappeared. Or was it, perhaps, those suspended minutes between life and death when an encounter with God told her that she would be healed?

“Spontaneous remission,” the doctor said. “Miracles from Heaven” is what the movie is called. Pam and I saw it last week. It’s a powerful feel-good Easter story of hope out of despair and life out of near-death. And it’s true, no matter how you might choose to interpret the truth.

**But that’s not what I want to talk about with you this morning.** It only get’s me going. It opens the way to another story, this one of biblical renown. It, too, is a story of truth in any and every way you might ever interpret such things. It’s a story filled with wounds and fear, astonishment and disbelief, locked doors and unexpected outcomes. But mostly it’s about Easter and hope, presence and power and life.

It’s early evening on the first Easter, this according to John’s account. The disciples were still soaked in the sadness of recent days but also quickened and bewildered by something that Mary Magdalene had said, “I have seen the Master!” This, by the way, was corroborated by two of the disciples, at least in part. So now the whole bunch of them were overcome by amazement, yes, but also in abject fear that the religious

authorities who had done Jesus in would come after them next. And so they locked all the doors in the house, and also the door to the room.

And then somehow, through walls that were solid rock and doors that were locked tight, Jesus entered and stood among them. Wait! How in the world? Huh? Dumbfounded. Dazed. Speechless. And then, as if that wasn't enough, he showed them the wounds in his hands and side - apparently to dissuade any wondering about him being an apparition of some sort. Then he spoke in the voice that always calmed them deep down: "Peace to you," not only once but twice just to be sure.

So do the obvious wondering with me! How did he get in? Either the locked doors, remember there was more than one of them, were not real, or the Risen Christ was more real than material boundaries. Either the solid walls were not real or Jesus was more real than the walls. Either their fears were not real or he was more real than anything that they knew or expected or could fully believe.

**Some stories from the Bible are called "thick stories."** This is clearly one of them. Thick stories are layered. They are not singular. They provide different clues of detail and contact and connection. They are suggestive and hint and hunch and point – all to keep the human mind wondering.

And this story about fear and insecurity; about locks and walls and barriers; about tangible signs like wounds and calming sounds like voices; about the want for evidence-based believing – is thick as can be. Even more: this story is important enough that John reports it happening a second time. Eight days later, the same thing, the same room, the same locked doors, the same solid walls, the same Jesus. The same wounds: still raw, palpable, touchable and undeniable. The same words and the same resonant promise, "peace be with you." And the same breath of life from the one who had died.

Do the wondering again. Either his death was not real or the breath of his life is more real than dying. Either he wasn't really there and they were all hallucinating or his presence was more real than all boundaries and separation, more real than all measures of time and space, and also of heaven and earth.

Now if the stalwart doubled-guarded doors of fear can't keep out God's grace from showing up; or the confusion and uncertain moments of life that come to bear can't keep us away from God's love or healing or hope what can? Paul was to write of this in times to come, "Nothing, but nothing, but nothing . . . can separate us from the love of God."

John ends his story with one more promise. He tells us, in essence, this is not the end of things to come, only the beginning. Because, in his words, "Jesus provides far more God-revealing signs than can be written down in one book."

**So here's one more thing for us to take in today.** Whether by Annabel's spontaneous remission and countless stories of real life-giving faith in the hearts of real people; or by the story of disciples living in fear and hiding behind locked doors . . . the power of resurrection and Easter and hope and life and healing are all around us, all the time.

Even those little hunches, or maybe especially those, for which we have no way to express or words to speak, except for the poet<sup>1</sup> . . .

A thousand thousand small deaths  
blows to my spirit  
wounds to my soul  
hurts to my body  
entanglements of mind  
humanity reduced, nearly destroyed.

A thousand thousand tiny resurrections  
my spirit uplifted  
my soul rested  
my body healing  
my mind refreshed, enlightened  
humanity restored, reaching for hope.

A new life?  
Redeemed?  
I don't know.

The specifics of the Christian faith pass me by.  
But I think, perhaps I'm learning  
something of death and resurrection.

I think, perhaps, I am learning, too. Something of the mystery that floats in the thin space between heaven and earth; something of locked doors but open hearts; something of hope and healing; something of death and resurrection. In the Living Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Burgess and Kathy Galloway, eds. [Praying for the Dawn](#). Wild Goose Publications, 2000, p. 170.