

AUDIO RETREAT

Easter People audio retreat 2023 | Week Three | Jesus enters the closed room [John 20.19-23]

Episode transcript

My wife bought a cushion in TKMAXX the other day – labelled ‘a little damaged but still adorable’. Most of us will admit to the first part of the description if applied to ourselves; most of us will struggle more with the second.

A little damaged... once newly made objects come into regular use, they begin to lose their original shine or integrity. A zip on a cushion breaks, a glass table becomes scratched, a newly painted floor becomes scuffed; a page of a book acquires creases and its cover marked.

Similarly, as we grow older our bodies bear the marks of life – wrinkles, scars, the twinges that come through past injuries. Our minds are also shaped by experiences – the impressions made by affirmation, rejection, success and failure, healing or hurt.

Consciousness differentiates us from material objects. I don't suppose a chair spends a sleepless night worrying about a spot of woodworm; or a mug twists itself around to conceal its chip; but we might feel anxious, we might want to hide. A cushion with a damaged zip won't pronounce judgement on itself, but we will label not only it, but ourselves, shaped by how others have responded to us and by our own assessment of what we have become. ‘A little damaged but still adorable?’ Or does your label read something else? The strange thing is that our label is not only worn outdoors but indoors. It might be the result of how others have responded to us over time, but ultimately the label is one we read and are shaped by, and it faces not only outwards but inwards.

One of the characteristics of the Jesus of the Gospels is his inability to go by the labels people wore, whether imposed from outside or borne within. His seeing of people was neither defined, or confined, by the tag they wore – be it ‘sinner’ or ‘tax collector’ or ‘beggar’ or ‘inadequate’ or ‘failure’ or ‘different’. He saw people ‘whole’, both in his initial seeing of them and in his slow, gradual drawing out of their inward gift through sharing life with them. His presence disentangled their ‘indoors’ world of thoughts, feelings and judgements, enabling them to express themselves more freely ‘outdoors’ in their relationships with others. This ‘indoors – outdoors’ movement lies at the heart of this Easter day story from John's Gospel:

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met was locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you’.

After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.’ After this he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the

Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

A story of indoors and outdoors. As the encounter begins, the disciples are gathered indoors, afraid of the threat that waits outdoors. Their fear is reasonable; their leader was arrested, summarily tried and executed. What lies in wait for them, his followers?

Jesus then enters the room where they are gathered, open to him though its doors are locked. Now he is with them, indoors. And with them there to help them move outdoors, sent, breathed upon, forgiven, calmed – freed from fear – or empowered to step out from the confines of a fear that is still real?

There is so much going on 'indoors' for most of us. I don't mean here inside a physical room, but within the home of our thoughts and our feelings. Our private world, furnished with the imprint of past and present experiences, the storehouse of our memories, hopes, and anxieties; our endless working outs and imaginations. This indoors world holds both what is going on for you today, and the familiar ebb and flow of fears, hopes and desires you experience day by day and year by year.

To this indoors the risen Jesus comes and speaks, 'Peace be with you'.

This greeting of peace does not remove the turbulent movements of our inner world; instead, the greeting of peace meets us within what is going on indoors - inside us. He shows us the wounds he has received; he meets us who also have our wounds. 'Peace be with you', he says once more. There is no need to hide away; no final place for blame or shame. 'For those you forgive, they are forgiven', he says; and his greeting of peace invites us to let go our self-judgement and begin to show compassion to whatever is wounded in us: a little damaged it is true, yet still adorable to this other who comes with kindness into our world.

This greeting of peace indoors, begins to free us to express ourselves outdoors. There is a wonderful poem of Gerard Manley Hopkins that echoes this movement of indoors to outdoors:

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*

Everything – the kingfisher, the dragonfly, the dropped stones, the swung bell, the tucked string of a guitar – everything 'finds tongue to fling out broad its name'. And then, stretching for language to express this, Hopkins writes that everything 'selves – goes itself; myself it

speaks and spells'. Everything is made to 'deal out that being indoors each one dwells' and to cry 'what I do is me: for that I came'.

In the locked room Jesus breathes his Spirit on all gathered there and sends them out, as he has been sent. This is something more than Jesus helping us to be at peace with the damage done to us and the damage we have caused. He is speaking our name, not labelling us, a name only he knows fully. He is drawing out and sending out that someone inside that we are: he is giving us not a label to define or confine us but an identity and a purpose: 'what I do is me, for that I came.'

I look at the inside of a tulip bowl, listen to the sound of a skylark high above me, stand beneath the shelter of a great tree, and see that each living thing is meant to express itself in this way – each one is, in its own particular originality, adorable. We might go on struggling to know that about ourselves 'indoors' in any consistent way, yet the breathing of God's Spirit within our spirit bids us trust and dare that self-expression, outdoors, that is also our particular work: 'as the Father sent me, so I send you.'

'A little damaged'; but are the scuffs, marks and chips evidence of the loss of our original newness, or is this Peace spoken to us and this breath of the Spirit within us the beginning of a life both original and new; an Easter life so vital in us that even the scuffs, marks and chips become its fruitfulness and its beauty? Still adorable?

There will be mornings when we wake up feeling anything but adorable and all too conscious of damage. For each of those mornings the Risen Jesus enters in, greets you with peace, breathes afresh the gift of you, and sends you out into the bright light of the sun: 'What I do is me, for that I came'.