

LOCKED IN AND LOVED OUT

Once upon a time, on this day, the first Sunday after Easter, a tiny but very deformed baby was left on the steps of Notre Dame Cathedral. The Archdeacon discovered him, and as it was this day, he named the poor little thing after the opening words in Latin of the Introit: Quasimodo. Of course, Quasimodo is more commonly known as the Hunchback of Notre Dame, the isolated and unloved figure who lived among the bells of the church. His was a fearful, isolated existence spent mostly in a very confined and closed-in space. And it was only because of love did he have the courage to finally emerge from the locked belfry in the Cathedral.

Last week we heard about the closed tomb whose stone had been rolled away. Today we've heard about the closed doors of the upper room where the disciples had locked themselves away for fear of the religious authorities. I remind you of both of these because opening up that which is closed is an essential truth of the Easter story. You and I aren't meant to live a closed-up existence, be it physical, emotional, or spiritual.

I'm bold enough to suggest that our faith can be a closed door—even a locked door which is steadfastly shut to the possibilities of new life offered in Christ's resurrection. We've been taught to believe only what we can see, what we can prove, what we can quantify. But we can do none of these things concerning the risen Christ. Yes of course we can read about him, yet these days we're also taught not to believe everything we read. And considering that our best Biblical scholars now believe that none of the accounts of the resurrection—neither Paul's nor the evangelists—were written by eyewitnesses, we might be tempted to ask whether they're even reliable, whether we can even believe any of these accounts.

Today's appropriately nicknamed "Low Sunday"—and perhaps you and I are feeling low, struggling as we do with whether the resurrection is merely a piece of old news. We may even be struggling with doubt and can't help but wonder if this is yet another instance of fake news. And who can blame us for feeling this way? After all the resurrection accounts don't meet modern standards of veracity and verifiability, what with all their discrepancies and supernatural appearances.

But to treat the resurrection like a piece of news which can be forensically examined, tested, and proved is problematic—to say the least. I'll even go so far as to say it's essentially a fool's errand. And I say this because the resurrection's *not* news. It's an event which leads to life—and love.

You see, resurrection isn't simply something we've been told about but can't experience. It's something we apprehend in our quotidian lives, and if it all seems so unbelievable maybe it's because we show very little evidence of its power working in us. Easter faith lets go of the past—no matter how sweet—and says a radical “yes” both to the present moment and the future promise. It refuses to succumb to doubt and despair and learns to laugh even in the face of death. It isn't about going to heaven after we die but about making this present hell a little more heavenly.

More and more I've come to think it's this last one which is the most important. Alas, we—and by we, I mean the Church—we've wasted so much time trying to convince folks that the resurrection accounts are reliable when what we should have been doing all along is showing them the power of this event in the here-and-now—and what it means for the future.

Because, when you think about it, the disciples didn't retreat into nostalgia, looking back to the good old days with the Master as they waited for their turn to join him in heaven. No: they set their faces and energy to the future and, in the power of the resurrection, began to remake the world into something resembling at least a little of the kingdom Jesus died to bring.

But—by what power? By the power of love. That sounds corny, and maybe it is. Maybe the power of love's as unbelievable as the resurrection. After all, you and I can't prove that love exists any more than we can prove the resurrection happened. We can't forensically dissect it. We probably can't even explain what it is—or how it works. But we can tell its truth in how we live, and in the how the lives we touch with love are transformed, invigorated, raised up—call it what you will.

I've spent much of my life locked up in a room of fear—and so have you. My particular locked room was called the closet. The names of your locked rooms are different—addiction, depression, loneliness—to name but a few. But whatever they're named, love was—and is—the way out of them. Sometimes love caresses us out of them and sometimes it yanks us out of them, but however it happens, we can only leave them by its power, power which is known by human touch.

And this is where things get interesting. Isn't it strange that last week Jesus said to Mary “Do not hold on to me,” yet today he says to Thomas, “Reach out your hand and put it in my side.” And then Jesus says, “Have you believed because you have seen me?” Well—yes, actually. How else could it be? We *have* seen him and that's why we believe. We've seen him and touched him and taken his life into our own. We've seen what resurrection life looks like. After all, we live in an Easter world whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask—or imagine.

But we must reach out to that power which even now yearns to free us because if we want to know resurrection, if we want to be drawn out of the locked room into new life which even now beckons with promise, we need to touch love's hand and believe

that not even death can break its grip. And that's not just a bit of old news. It's the living truth. Prove it by how you love and live—even in the midst of fear and doubt.