

“Raise a Ruckus!”

New London UMC

Holy Humor, April 24-25, 2022

Psalm 150; John 20:19-31 NRSV

Rev. Joyce Rich

The first sentence of our reading from the Gospel of John says:

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews

John 20:19a NRSV

This was the evening of the day that started with Mary Magdalene running to find Simon Peter and the other disciple to tell them that someone had taken Jesus’ body out of the tomb. Then Peter and the other disciple ran to see if that was true, and they also found the tomb to be empty. They returned home while Mary stayed and wept outside the tomb. Later Mary Magdalene ran to see all of the disciples to tell them that she had seen the Lord, and shared what the risen Jesus had told her. For Jesus’ disciples, it was a lot to take in. It was confusing and amazing. And by that evening it led to the disciples meeting together in one house – with all the doors to the house being locked. Now the Gospel of John says they locked the doors, “for fear of the Jews.” Most people would say that meant Jesus’ disciples were afraid of the Jewish authorities. That the disciples locked the doors in fear of the people who had plotted to have Jesus killed – and who might also want to eliminate Jesus’ disciples, particularly if they wanted to put a stop to any rumors that Jesus had risen from the dead.

So was it fear of an outside authority trying *to break in* that led the disciples to lock the doors? Or did they lock the doors to try *to contain* the fear of all the Jewish disciples in the house? Did they lock the doors of the house because THEY didn’t know what was going on, or what it meant, or where or when Jesus might appear again? Were they just trying to keep everyone together while they hashed out some kind of plan, some way to be on the lookout for the risen Jesus? I mean Peter and the other disciple had already MISSED seeing Jesus in the garden by the tomb because they left BEFORE Mary saw Jesus there. Maybe that near miss made them ALL afraid that they could really screw things up if they weren’t at the right place at the right time? I imagine they might have been desperately trying to remember everything Jesus had told them before his death, in order to understand what the risen Jesus told Mary Magdalene. Or maybe they were in prayer? Or still in shock? What exactly was going on with Jesus’ disciples?

Well, Jesus decided to find out. So he showed up inside the locked house with them. Well that must have set the disciples all aflutter! How the heck did Jesus get in?! How could he be there talking to them?! Showing them the wounds in his hands and side?! How was that possible?! Imagine their fear and wonder! Did they shout for joy? Or did they burst into tears? Did they start jumping up and down, or collapse on the floor? Do you think

they would have exchanged the first century version of ‘high fives’ – or fist bumps – when they realized that Jesus was right there – risen from the dead – and with them?! Did Jesus’ disciples start to whoop it up – or were they still too afraid of making any loud noises that could draw unwanted attention to their house?

And why wasn’t Thomas there with them that night? Had he walked out after Mary Magdalene said she had seen Jesus risen from the dead? Had he not believed what she had to say – just as he refused to believe what his fellow disciples had to say about seeing Jesus that evening? Did he really think that they were lying? Or was the thought of Jesus risen from the dead too much for Thomas to comprehend? Did he think that it was too good to be true? What had happened to Thomas in his life that he felt the need to not get his hopes up that Jesus had truly risen from the dead?

Maybe if we knew more about Thomas we’d understand why people today still put their hand out to physically stop someone from sharing their witness to the good news that Jesus has risen from the dead. Maybe we need to understand why they don’t want to hear about it, and can’t believe it. Is it that they think that we’re lying? Or do they think it all sounds too good to be true? Have they already been let down and disappointed so many times that they refuse to ever get their hopes up again? Is that the fear that’s locking them down? . . . Or have they simply never heard about Jesus at all – so why should they care if he’s risen from the dead? And have they not heard about Jesus because we are too afraid to say anything to anyone – because we don’t want people to turn away from us, or feel rejected. Have we locked the good news up inside the church because of our fear? Have we forgotten that Jesus has also breathed the Holy Spirit on us – and that we have received Jesus’ peace, and are to carry on Jesus’ mission of being sent out to share that peace with others? Have we forgotten, or are we too afraid to remember? How is it with our souls? I would invite us to enter into a time of confession before God.