

Behind Locked Doors

A week passed, and now the disciples were again in the same house, again behind locked doors, but this time Thomas was with them (John 20:24-28). They've told Thomas they'd seen the risen Jesus. But he didn't believe them. He wouldn't take their word for it. He was always so independent-minded, so hard to convince, so quick to see the dark side of things. He had to see the risen Jesus for himself. "Unless," he said, "I see it, I won't believe it." So again into this locked room Jesus came. One moment he wasn't there and then he was. And he turned to Thomas and said, "Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas, it seems, didn't bother. He just, we picture, went pale. The blood rushed from his face and then rushed back in, and he cried out, "My Lord and my God."

So to this point, from John's account of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, we have seen that breathing and forgiveness and God are all interconnected – that breathing and forgiveness are part of encountering the presence of God (John 20:19-23). But now we see something perhaps even more remarkable that connects us to encountering the presence of God. Two evenings the disciples were there, once without Thomas, once with him, behind locked doors – no way to get in – and both times Jesus just came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Both times, "though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them." And maybe we say, "Well, that was a miracle; of course, Jesus could do that!" And skeptics say, "Sheer nonsense. Rank superstition!" But what if we have in this story a window into reality, a window into the way things really are?

Today quantum physicists offer us tantalizing possibilities when they tell us that what we take to be our own rock-solid presence isn't so rock-solid, that even where we are seen to be at any given moment in time is more a statistical probability than rock-solid fact. And astronomers tell us that the space within the atoms in our bodies, that is, the empty space between the electrons and nucleus of an atom (made up of protons and neutrons) – picture it as a bit like our solar system, this nucleus and these electrons orbiting around it – this empty space between the electrons and the nucleus in a single atom inside us is comparable in scale to the empty space between the planets and the sun. O.K.? This doesn't make sense to you? It doesn't make sense to anyone, well, hardly anyone. It just appears to be the truth, according to contemporary science.

Or imagine dimensions beyond the three we see – length and width and height. Imagine a fourth one, a fourth dimension. Scientists tell us there are many more than four! Ten, eleven, maybe more. Just stick with one more. Imagine how a being who could operate in that fourth dimension would be perceived by us. Well, you can't. I can't. We can't. But maybe, in the spirit of E.A. Abbott's *Flatland*, we can imagine a two-dimensional universe, a flatland, just length and width. Imagine two "people" in this flatland; they can only see in two dimensions, along the length-width plane that they are on. (I'm now drawing on an illustration by Rob Bell in his excellent presentation and later DVD, "Everything Is Spiritual.") Now I, a three-dimensional being, come right up to them. I'm

not on their plane. They can't see me. And I put the palm of my hand so very, very close to them, right up against them. And one of them says, "Hey, did you sense that?"

– "What?" the other says.

– "I thought I sensed something. Did you?"

– "Nope!"

– "You didn't? It was right here!"

And the other says, "You're crazy, you know that! You're crazy!"

But who is right and who is wrong?

Or suppose that I, this three-dimensional me, decide to really interact with them, and I just stick my hand fingers-first straight into their 2-D world, right through the plane they live on. And now they both see something. Five circles, different sizes, different times, first one, then another; finally my thumb makes it through. And one, the skeptic, says, "So what? Five circles! Big deal!"

And the other says, "No, I think they're all somehow connected here! I think there's a pattern. These five circles are connected. Something's going on!" And the other says, "You're crazy!"

But who is right and who is wrong?

So now we return to Jesus those Sunday evenings in Jerusalem. The doors are locked. And Jesus just shows up in the middle of his disciples. Just maybe we have here an encounter like this: a hint of higher reality, of a God who moves through the fourth dimension – or however many dimensions there are. And so he is as close as the air we breathe. No, he is closer. Literally, in him we live and move and have our being. God is always right here, right now. Though our doors are locked, he is here among us.

The challenge then, intellectual and spiritual, is to encounter the presence of God, to be still and aware of the presence of God within and all around us, the presence of a loving God whom we need not fear but who really is the way, the truth and the life, who really is transcendent, glorious reality. We deny or defy this God only at great risk to ourselves. In this God we live and move and have our being. Or we don't. And if we realize this, all sorts of thing become possible, including rising out of ourselves, letting go of the way we're stuck in ourselves, experiencing forgiveness and extending it to others. It's all connected – breath and God and forgiveness. It's all connected. Everything.

– Dale Pauls