

Sunday Sermon April 12, 2026
Rev. Coleen Tully

The disciples were behind locked doors because they were afraid. They were behind locked doors on Easter Day and, a week later, still huddled together, frightened, hiding, and, at least in Thomas' case, filled with doubt. They hardly appear to be the beginning of a movement that will transform human history. But there we have it.

In one way or another, we know how it feels to be trembling behind closed doors, hiding from things that frighten us.

What locks us up tends to be things like fears and insecurities, illnesses, compulsions and hurts—both those experienced and caused—relationships we do or do not have, doubts, false pride or pretentiousness, suspiciousness, and of course, sin.

The Easter story confirms that God easily goes through our locked doors and comes to us. Jesus didn't wait for the disciples to figure out that they didn't need to be afraid anymore and unlock the doors themselves. And Jesus didn't wait for Thomas to stop doubting. He didn't wait for any of them to do anything different or to be anyone different. He showed up. And he loved them. That's all. And that was enough.

That's what the resurrected Lord does. God comes through our locked doors, into the very middle of whatever our stuff is on any particular day, and loves us.

The author explains that while he had many stories, signs, and wonders to choose from, he picked the ones he did so that we may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing we may have life in his name.

And that life is not only something promised after death, but something meant for here and now. We are invited into a life of divine love, purpose, and spiritual vitality today—a vibrant, abundant life in his name. I claim and believe in and look forward to eternal life, and I also try daily to live in the joyful knowledge of God's grace-filled love in the here and now.

I love that "Doubting Thomas" is an essential Gospel story to help us "come to believe." When I was little, I got the impression that I wasn't supposed to be like him. That guy. He wouldn't just believe his fellow disciples. He insisted on seeing for himself. He just had to have his own physical proof.

Little did anyone know—because I certainly didn't tell them—that when I was a little girl sitting in the church pews, I was praying that if there really was a God, if God was real, would he or she please just blow out the altar candles so I would know for sure.

And guess what? It never happened.

I had the impression that Thomas's nickname of Doubting Thomas was not really a complimentary thing, but alluded to him having a weak faith. And I was pretty sure I would be judged the same, so my shattered hopes at only seeing flickering candles every single Sunday remained a secret. Me being weak in faith just like Thomas was hidden away in shame.

But now that I've grown up, weakness is not what I see in Thomas. I see a man who desired a holy and beautiful thing. I see someone who wanted his own living encounter with Jesus—a man who wouldn't settle for a secondhand experience of resurrection, a man who stuck around in the hope of having his own experience of the resurrected Christ.

It's not easy to confess uncertainty in the midst of those who are certain, so I also think he was courageous. Theologian Paul Tillich said doubt is an element of faith, not the opposite and not a deterrent. Doubt can propel us into deeper learning, into soul searching, and into spiritual revelation. Faith based on absolute certainty leads to fanaticism, but faith tempered with doubt becomes mature.

Through Thomas we are given permission, and actually invited, to yearn for more—more intimacy and more encounter with the living, breathing Christ.

Another thing I like about Thomas's story is that he doubted out loud, unlike me secretly praying for candles to go out and feeling like a sinner for asking such a thing, for even needing such proof. He seems to be without shame or guilt, and his faith community allowed him to do that with acceptance.

I have witnessed the miraculous impact of a faith community that makes room and time for the non-believer, for the wary and the skeptical. I spent over 30 years watching addicts with deep wounds around God dip their toes into the water of faith communities and either be met with people who followed Jesus's example and accepted them where they were at and engulfed them into their school of love until they swam like the fish surrounding them, or be met by faith communities who rejected them for showing up barefoot.

I love that Jesus met Thomas right where he was, and I love that his community accepted what he needed to do.

I also love that Jesus opened a way for Thomas through the marks of his own suffering. He shared his wounded body so that Thomas could find a way to wholeness.

At first, I thought it was weird that Jesus's resurrected body still had scars. And it didn't seem like they were faded, old, scabbed-over scars, either. They had to be raw enough to allow a doubting disciple to put his fingers inside. And that couldn't have been very pretty.

Our culture is adept at many forms of artful cover-ups. But if Jesus, even at the peak of his victory over death, exhibited his open wounds without shame or apology, maybe we don't need

to worry so much about glossy presentation. Maybe Christianity's deepest witness is not perfection, but its willingness to embrace real bodies, real scars, and real pain.

I think this makes a few important points. One is that Jesus honored the body—the real body. He honored the disabled, injured, wounded, broken, real-life bodies in which we live.

Another is that some wounds are for keeps. Sometimes we have been inflicted with pain, loss, trauma, horror, or hurt, and it leaves traces that nothing will be able to take away. Some of our wounds will remain, and I think need to remain, even after resurrection.

I am a living example of that truth. I have some wounds I can barely look at myself sometimes. The times I will look, though, are the times—like Jesus did—when someone he cared about, when his friend Thomas, needed to know that sin and death and brokenness do not have the last word.

Our wounds, Jesus's wounds, have a purpose. There are times we might be the living proof of resurrection from a tragedy that someone needs to see.

I can't close without commenting on Jesus's words during the first visit: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said 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."

And yet, even after offering peace, Jesus immediately sends them out into the world—a world where forgiveness will be hard. Which is why these words from Frederick Buechner ring so true:

"Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you."

The risen Christ makes himself known to us, setting us free from our darkest fears. He blesses those who struggle to believe but stay anyway. He leans toward those who yearn for more. He leads with woundedness so that we might follow him into life.

May we find our solace, our hope, and our courage in the wounded, risen Christ.

Breathe on us, Breath of God. Amen.