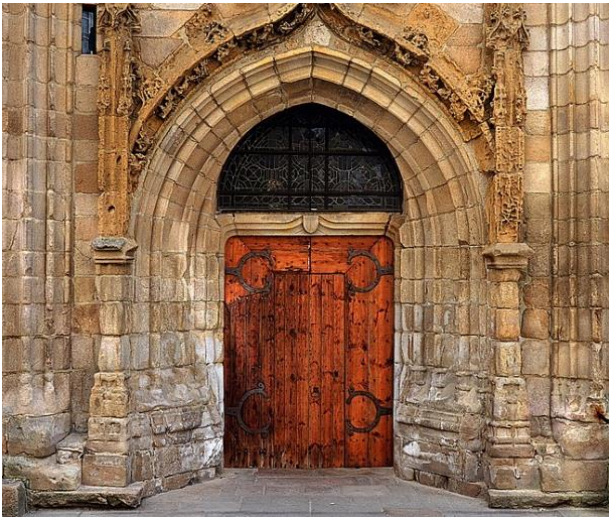


## High St Uniting Church Frankston

The doors we hide behind

John 20: 19 - 31



They had heard Mary's story about finding the tomb empty. Peter and John had run to the tomb and found it empty as well. They had then heard Mary's account of meeting Jesus - risen from death and alive! And yet, fear still gripped them, and they remained behind a locked door. And, in one of those details that people point to as a support for Jesus' resurrection to a new form of body, Jesus comes and stands with them, despite the locked door. The door can keep out the enemies, it can help with the fear, but it can't keep out Jesus. Jesus, who offers real peace, a peace that comes despite all the violence that he has

endured. Jesus, who, in one of John's delightful little word plays, breathes the Holy Spirit on them. Jesus, who sends them through that locked door, out into the real world on the continuing mission to make the grace of God in Jesus Christ known in the world. Jesus, who, in coming the following week, must have been a little disappointed. Not because of Thomas's doubt but disappointed that the disciples are still behind closed doors. They hadn't understood the peace, they hadn't received the offered Spirit, and they hadn't headed out on mission. While for centuries we have focussed on the story of Thomas and the positive negativity of doubt, we seem to have stepped over the story of the locked doors and gone on to build churches and monasteries like castles, rules and creeds like barriers, respectability and privilege like armour, and hunkered down safe behind our locked doors.

*Many years ago, I participated in a personal growth course and one of the exercises was to imagine your fear, your worst fear, and then think through what could happen, and then what could happen and then what could happen. Within a couple of minutes, the whole room was in laughter as we all realised that there was no dire end, and fear was a product of imagination and not reality.*

The disciples had the doors locked because of their fear of the religious authorities, the ones who had sent Jesus to the cross. They imagined that the same punishment awaited them. The presence of the Risen Jesus in their midst was a clear signal that their fear was imagined and not reality. Jesus had endured the worst that could happen, and God had brought him back, alive, and real. There was no need to lock the door, there was no need to live in fear, life with God through Jesus the Christ was life. Full, real life that death could not stop. The stories of the Spirit filled apostles in the Book of Acts showed that they did get that message. John's picture of the disciples in the locked room is not the end, and yet it seems to picture the behaviour of the church so perfectly in so many places, through out time and right up to now.

And thinking this way, noticing the doors and the barriers, it is so easy to point the finger at certain churches, and denominations, and church schools in the news, without remembering that when you point your finger, there are three pointing back at you. Can we look deeply into our hearts and behaviours and see the doors that we hide behind?

The doors of fear; fear of ridicule, fear that we are not good enough to be disciples, fear that things will change. And we need to look and see that all those fears are imagined and not reality. What are we scared of?

We have the doors of Personal faith. Lock out any argument or challenge by saying we all have our own beliefs and images of God and it's all fine. Or lock away any possibility of criticism by saying we are not out to proselytise or convince, we respect all beliefs. Behind those locked doors the mission of Jesus to share the grace of God cannot proceed.

We have the doors of Theology with their big hinges of Creeds and Dogmas. You are not a real Christian unless you ... We lock out controversial and challenging ideas or issues. Issues that are usually about morals and not about the nature of God or the good news of grace in Jesus Christ. Behind these locked doors the church withers and loses the language or the ability to communicate with the world.

We have the doors of Respectability. Lock out the riff raff and the undesirables, we have standards of dress and behaviour. Despite all the gospel stories of Jesus dining and sharing with sinners, and all the warnings in scripture about pandering to the rich at the expense of the poor, we are still very formal, and ordered, and ritualised. Behind these locked doors we keep the good news of God's grace to ourselves.

And we have the Churchy doors. Lock out the world's issues of, work, finance, family relationships, we only talk about churchy things, things of faith and scripture. Despite all the Gospel stories with Jesus addressing real people where they were in their lives. Behind these locked doors, the church ceases to have relevance.

We need to unlock our doors and let the world in. We aren't locked in; the locks are on the inside. We need to let the peace that the Risen Jesus offers conquer fears of our imagination. The world is not out to silence us or persecute us; most of them have little or no idea of who we are and what we offer. New ideas are not a threat to our faith or our existence, and new members aren't out to take over and change things. We need to open ourselves to the life and power of the Spirit to drive us out of our locked doors into a world that is actually hungry for meaning, thirsting for true relationships, and seeking assistance and answers. The power of the Resurrection is that the stone is rolled away from the tomb and Jesus is out in the world, let's replicate that and throw open the doors that we hide behind.