

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Group members in turn place their house or apartment keys near a lighted candle at the center of the group. Each states something these keys lock out and something they lock in.

LEADER: Alleluia. This is the new day the Creator has made! Let us be glad and rejoice.

ALL: Give thanks for God is good; God's love lasts forever.

LEADER: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

ALL: Give thanks for God is good; God's love lasts forever.

LEADER: There is nothing to fear. I am the First and the Last and the One who lives.

ALL: Alleluia. This is the new day the Creator has made.

Alleluia.

Easter is a hinge moment. Jesus' resurrection opens a future of lasting communion with God. This is the good news Jesus commissions Mary Magdalene to announce when they meet in the garden. Their encounter happens after Mary Magdalene brings Peter and the beloved disciple to see the empty tomb and the two return home.

Mary Magdalene stays at the empty tomb, grieving and weeping. Two angels ask, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She explains Jesus' body has been taken away. A man Mary Magdalene mistakes for a gardener asks, "Woman,

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by SUNDAY

why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" Mary Magdalene explains she is looking for the missing body. Then the gardener speaks her name, "Mary." She turns and says, "Teacher," recognizing Jesus' voice.

Jesus commissions Mary Magdalene to go to his disciples and explain, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." The relationships Jesus has made with his disciples will last. His Father is our Father; we are Jesus' brothers and sisters in lasting communion.

Mary Magdalene returns to the disciples and tells them, "I have seen the Lord." She gives them his message. She is the apostle to the apostles, the first preacher of the good news of Jesus' resurrection. The encounter between Jesus risen and Mary Magdalene happens early Easter morning.

This Sunday finds the whole company of Jesus' disciples together in the city. It is Easter evening. They have locked the doors where they pray because they fear the officials who put Jesus to death.



Mary Charles McGough, OSB

These disciples become the original Christian community. Many of them traveled from village to village with Jesus in Galilee and accompanied him to Jerusalem. They must know each other quite well—the eleven, Jesus' mother, Mary Magdalene, and many other women and men, many whose names are lost. By Luke's count the community that gathers after Jesus' ascension numbers 120.

● **Imagine yourself among the disciples praying together. What do you think and feel about Mary Magdalene's good news?**

GOSPEL

The risen Jesus appears to his disciples.

NARRATOR: On the evening of the first day of the week, even though the disciples had locked the doors of the place where they were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood before them.

JESUS: Peace be with you.

NARRATOR: When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. At the sight of the Lord the disciples rejoiced.

JESUS: Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

NARRATOR: Then Jesus breathed on them and said:

JESUS: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven them. If you hold them fast, they are held fast.

NARRATOR: It happened that one of the Twelve, Thomas (the name means *Twin*), was absent when Jesus came. The other disciples kept telling him:

DISCIPLES: We have seen the Lord!

THOMAS: I'll never believe it without probing the nail-prints

in his hands, without putting my finger in the nail-marks and my hand into his side.

NARRATOR: A week later, the disciples were once more in the room, and this time Thomas was with them. Despite the locked doors, Jesus came and stood before them.

JESUS: Peace be with you. Thomas, take your finger and examine my hands. Put your hand into my side. Do not persist in your unbelief, but believe!

THOMAS: My Lord and my God!

JESUS: You became a believer because you saw me. Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed.

NARRATOR: Jesus performed many other signs not recorded here in the presence of his disciples. But these have been recorded to help you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, so that through this faith you may have life in his name.

John 20.19-31



answering questions, retelling her encounter with Jesus. Those who fled at Jesus' arrest may be kicking themselves and need reconciliation. Peter knows he is not the loyal friend and follower of Jesus he thought he was. Perhaps the community has locked the door to keep out not only those who put Jesus to death but also the mind-blowing news of Jesus' resurrection.

Encounters with the divine always mix fear and fascination. Do the disciples fear those who put Jesus to death in the past, or do they fear the overwhelming amazement of a new creation, a divine surprise?

● What do you think Jesus' friends fear most—the past with their failures or the future with its promise?

● When have you experienced a community locked in fear and in need of a visit from the risen Jesus? What might Jesus say?

Jesus appears in the midst of the community, extending peace. His wounds identify him as the same person who was crucified. The disciples rejoice.

Jesus extends peace to them a second time. He commissions them as a community to continue his mission—"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

As a third step, Jesus breathes on them. This is what God does in Genesis 2.7. God breathes life into the newly formed human, who becomes a living being. On Easter the Son of God breathes the

Jesus breathes his Spirit upon his disciples.

The community to which the risen Jesus appears has gathered in the evening of the first day of the week—Sunday. Jews celebrate Saturday as Sabbath, as a day of rest, worship, and re-creation. Saturday is the seventh day of creation, the day God rests from the work

of the six days. For Christians Sunday is a new day, the day of Jesus' resurrection and our new life in Christ, an eighth day of creation.

Jesus' disciples lock the room where they have gathered. At least two among them believe Jesus has risen. Mary Magdalene may circulate,



creative, living Spirit of God upon the community. “Receive the Holy Spirit,” Jesus says. His gift empowers the disciples to become a reconciling community that forgives sins. “If you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven them.”

The Bible translation Catholics hear at Mass has Jesus say next, “And whose sins you retain are retained.” This translation aligns Jesus’ words with those in Matthew’s gospel when he gives Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven (16.19).

Bible scholar Sandra Schneider observes that the Greek word translated *retained* or *bound* more commonly means *to hold fast, to embrace*. She argues that Jesus is charging the community to hold fast the people they forgive. As a reconciling community, they are to embrace and support those they forgive, not to hold them bound to their sins. This is our call in continuing Jesus’ mission—to be the face of forgiveness and mercy among those in our lives.

John’s emphasis on the community is like the Second Vatican Council’s emphasis on the responsibility of the people of God. Pope Francis has reiterated the Council’s universal call to holiness. The whole Church community in

all its members is the body of Christ in the world today.

Jesus entrusts us to one another’s care. We can strengthen bonds among us, and we can shred relationships. We can remember wrongs that have been righted. We can exclude those who trouble and test us. In his gift of peace to the original Christian community, Jesus insists that his followers have the power to build and hold together as a community.

- Who holds you fast?
- Who negotiates peace in your family and parish community?
- How do you use your power to speak and make peace? In what setting most often?

Thomas occupies center stage in the second half of Sunday’s gospel. Thomas’s doubt and subsequent faith parallel the mystery of how later generations of Christians grow into faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection. In the story Thomas touches Jesus’ hands, feet, and side for all of us who are not among the first witnesses.

In John 17.21 Jesus prays for all of us who will believe in him on the strength of his

disciples’ word. We Christians of later generations have no option but believing on the word and witness of others.

The generation for whom the fourth gospel was written had no choice either but to believe the witness of the community.

In every believer’s life, the community’s faith sometimes must carry the doubts of an individual. By including the story of Thomas’s doubt and faith, John’s community challenges itself to faith in Jesus’ presence and absence.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed,” John writes (20.29). Thomas’s story challenges us, the people of God in our world today, to respond to the needs that we touch and that touch us. We experience Christ in these encounters. We can see in our world Christians at work making peace and sharing both the afflictions and joys of others.

We can recognize people among us who need shelter, are learning new languages, and rebuilding their lives after losing homes and livelihoods to war or fire or violence.

We can see the threat of driving while Black or getting sick while poor.



We can touch wounds that tell the cost of love for the world.

We can hear words of forgiveness that the community has received from the risen Christ, words that bear the power of the Spirit. Jesus sends us as the Father sent him (John 20.21).

● **What wounds do groups in your parish or neighborhood tend? What wounds touch you that you might help others see and join in care?**

● **How does the story of Thomas coming to faith resemble your own journey?**



Jesus' witnesses speak boldly.

The first 12 chapters of the Acts of the Apostles emphasize Peter's importance in the early Christian community. On Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter is the first to preach the good news that Jesus is risen and proclaim him Lord and Messiah publicly.

In Acts 2-5, Luke makes a parallel between Jesus' early ministry and that of his followers. Jesus preached God's nearness, healed the sick, and cast out ungodly spirits.

Sunday's first reading shows the apostles boldly teaching in Solomon's Portico, a revered spot in the Temple courtyard, perhaps a Christian meeting place. People bring their sick to be cured at the apostles' hands. Luke wants us to recognize the early Church continues Jesus'

ministry. Acts tells the story of the disciples Jesus sent forth and the signs and wonders they do in the power of the Spirit.

Many become Jesus' followers.

Through the hands of the apostles, many signs and wonders occurred among the people. By mutual agreement they used to meet in Solomon's Portico. No one else dared to join them, despite the fact that the people held them in great esteem. Nevertheless more and more believers, men and women in great numbers, were continually added to the Lord.

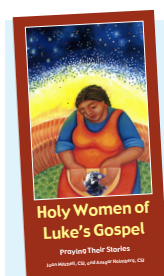
The people carried sick people into the streets and laid them on cots and mattresses, so that when Peter passed by at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them. Crowds from the towns around Jerusalem would gather, too, bringing their sick and those who were troubled by unclean spirits, all of whom were cured.

Acts 5.12-16

● **What signs and wonders does the Holy Spirit work among us and through us today?**

● **How does faith heal? How has faith healed you?**

● **What demonstrates that your community of faith continues Jesus' mission?**



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PRAY

LEADER: The community gathered and locked the doors but did not keep Jesus out.

ALL: *The peace of the risen Christ is with us.*

LEADER: As the Father sent Jesus to dwell with us, so Jesus, who has risen, sends us.

ALL: *We have nothing to fear.*

LEADER: Jesus breathes on us and gives us his Holy Spirit.

ALL: *Whose sins we forgive are forgiven.*

LEADER: Let us not persist in unbelief but believe.

ALL: *Blessed are we who have not seen but believe.*

LEADER: May the risen Jesus unlock those doors that try to keep him out. As we each take our keys back, let us name a door we want to keep open this Easter.

Take time for each to name a door.

LEADER: Let us go forth in peace to love and witness in the Spirit.

ALL: *To live the Christian story in our time.*

LEADER: This is the new day the Creator has made.

ALL: *Let us be glad and rejoice!*

