

CONFESSION IN CONFINEMENT

Series: Encounters
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John 20: 24-29

We have been following Jesus' life after Easter. This was a very special and unique Easter. We lived through History. I saw a document that said, this Easter, which as 3 weeks ago, not only was the tomb empty but so were churches. That upsets some people, some people find it a factual statement but that was the reality of this Easter.

There is the research department of a University in the US that was tracking cellphone data that showed that people overwhelmingly stayed at Home around Easter and then gradually that started changing as people are beginning to get tired of staying at home and as economic pressure builds, political pressure and also just as stay at home orders there change.

Here, things never closed down completely but things greatly downsized and so many people who depend on daily labour especially at people's homes felt and are feeling the pressure. I hear many companies are cutting down salaries or furloughing people. While many asking those who can to stay at home.

The thing is, never in our lifetime has the death, resurrection of Jesus, his time after resurrection and outpouring of the Holy Spirit been so relevant like the times we are living through.

Because Guess, what are watching lives streams from behind closed doors after Easter, the disciples were behind closed doors after the resurrection. A lot. This year, it is not just an image, it is quite literal.

And they were behind closed doors out of fear. They fear that those who killed Jesus would come for them They feared so much. We are behind closed doors for other reasons but most are meeting their fears behind closed doors.

What shall we eat? How will our business fare? Will we have to close down? Will we get infected?

Some literally living with their fear as they find no escape from their failing relationships and the unfortunate reality of the increase in domestic violence and mental health issues.

So it is quite a significant time in history we are living through and Easter and the period leading up to Pentecost has never been quite relevant in our lifetime.

So during these times, Jesus made some very special appearance. He appears to his disciples and hundreds of people and performed many miracles. 40 days more after the resurrection, he just hung around.

And his is why this period was important. Because it is these encounters sparked the Jesus movement. When Jesus prophesied that he would build the church on the confession that

He was the Christ, this was the moment. These encounters sprung faith in disciples that had shrunk in fear and lost faith to a point that they were ready to even die for this message. And most of them end up dying for the Kingdom.

And not just the 12, even Jesus' own brothers end up putting their faith in him as God. What would convince your brothers that you are worth something let alone, that you are God? James and Jude were brothers of Jesus and they end up putting their faith in him. What would make anyone do that? Encounters with the resurrected Jesus.

One of the cool things is that Jesus was showing up behind closed doors. And that has been what we have been prophesying over you guys. That is the season of being behind closed doors Jesus would show up in an undeniable encounter. Our closed doors cannot keep him out if even the tomb could not hold him.

So here is another thing I want you to do, comment on the Livestream, how God has been showing up for you. Even now, how are you feeling the presence of God? These will not only be encouraging to people watching but also cement that in your heart. In what ways has the risen Jesus shown up for you in the last week or even now during this Livestream that is stirring up faith in you.

So last week, Bill talked about an appearance Jesus made around the dinner table. And this appearance was unique because it was the second time he was doing it in this fashion, So I am going to take Jesus' queue and do it again. Because this appearance is just so rich.

So here is the background Jesus had shown up behind closed doors but one of the disciples was missing. So probably he was the one sent to do grocery shopping for the lockdown or he was out, side disobeying curfew orders or he was marching against the lockdown orders or he was an essential worker and he had to be out.

For some reason, Jesus shows up but he is missing. So he comes back and everyone is raging about how they have seen the Lord. And that is frustrating.

It hurts. Let's walk with this. Jesus had given him hope. And hope can be dangerous. Because if you had stopped believe that things can change unfulfilled hope can break your heart into pieces. Yet Jesus had given him hope and he gave his 3 years to him. Faithfully following, learning.

Then Jesus died. In his mind, the messiah was not supposed to die. How could he have died on him? And as he is grieving and coming into terms with it, the guys start saying that they have seen Jesus. That is unfair. He does not want to get his hopes up, because he is afraid of what will happen if it is not true.

If you have ever loved and had your heart broken you know better than anyone how careful you get with someone raising your hopes for new.

So I get where Thomas is. I would be hurt too. So he says that he would not believe unless not only does Jesus show up but he touches his wounds. He is raising the bar.

You know how frustrating it can be when you are in a bad place and all you see, in this age of social media, is friends saying how God has shown up for them. They found new love, they got a job, God is speaking to them.

And you just wanna go, why is he not showing up for me then? This is where Tom is. And he raises the bar, if surely this is true I want to not only see him but touch him.

And I know some of us are there. Some of you abandoned faith because life hurt. Some got tired of feeling like God did not show up for them. Some of you are afraid of hope. Because if you dare believe in God it will make you hope, that the world can be and will be better. It will make you hope that the Holy Spirit moves. And hope is scary for you. So you have raised the bar or so you think.

And you know, something Bill pointed out last time, the whole lot of them did not believe that Jesus has risen from the dead. And so this is why Tom is being singled out unfairly. They all had lost faith and hid as anyone would.

You see, the thing about confinement is that it shows us our true confession. The thing about this season is that it is showing us what our faith is made of. There are things we confessed that we did not believe. These guys confessed that Jesus was the Messiah but after his death, they realised how much they had not quite believed it. So they ran.

Some of us stood in corporate worship and confessed that God is provider but now with our incomes slowing in confinement our true confession is showing up. Some of us confessed Jesus is healer but now as we stay confined and a virus rages war, our true confession is being seen as some embrace fear. So there was Thomas's true confession, I will not believe unless I see for myself and touch his wounds.

So as I get into the story, I want you to think about some of the confessions that were just out of social pressure for you and that this confinement has exposed.

This is what happens.

John 20: 24-29

All of the eleven were present except for Thomas. He heard the accounts of each brother's interaction with the Lord.

The Other Disciples: We have seen the Lord!

Thomas: Until I see His hands, feel the wounds of the nails, and put my hand to His side, I won't believe what you are saying.

Eight days later, they gathered again behind locked doors; and Jesus reappeared. This time Thomas was with them.

Jesus: May each one of you be at peace.

He drew close to Thomas.

Jesus: Reach out and touch Me. See the punctures in My hands; reach out your hand, and put it to My side; leave behind your faithlessness, and believe.

Thomas (filled with emotion): You are the one True God and Lord of my life.

Jesus: Thomas, you have faith because you have seen Me. Blessed are all those who never see Me and yet they still believe.

So Thomas sees Jesus and he is awed. You know when you are playing tough and you are saying how you want a person out of your league to go toe to toe with you and they actually show up and kinda go, "I hear you are asking for my attention."

Usually, these moments make you shrink and you wanna take back what you said. You know I wasn't that serious. That Kinda thing. I think this is what is happening with poor old Tom. "I can see him going, I did not mean I that way" then Jesus says to him to touch the wounds and he goes, "We really don't have to" And obviously that is my own recreation but what is fantastic is that Jesus shows up and it seems this showing up was just for Thomas because he asked.

Isn't that cool? So for all those who are asking the Jesus shows up? Don't stop. It matters to him so much he will.

And here is the beautiful things when we have an encounter with Jesus in confinement it changes our confession. Coz when Tom saw and touched Jesus when he had an encounter with the risen Jesus in confinement, it changed his confession from I will not believe to one of worship and he said, "You are my Lord and my God".

There is something special about moments of shrinking and confinement. They not only peso what our confessions are really made of, but when we encounter Jesus in these moments, it brings out of us a new, deeper confession and worship. The kind of worship that will be birthed out of this season? Oh my word, we have not yet seen.

So that is why again I'm asking you. Tell us how God has been showing up in your life in confinement and what confession is it birthing in you.

A few interesting things. When Jesus showed up to Mary at the tomb, which we were talking about 2 weeks ago, he said, "Don't hold on to me, I have to go back to our father. "

So Jesus was not in a hurry but it seems he had very intentional and important work to do before the assertion into heaven. Almost like schedule. So he made his first appearance behind closed doors but one guy is missing. And it seems like he has to redo that one just for this one guy.

That is how convinced I am that God is pursuing you, pursuing the heart of the church. Pursuing the world and he will show up in undeniable ways just for you.

And this is why it was so important, church tradition has it that Thomas was a missionary to Asia and this is where he died. You see, he needed to be in his place, because of what was coming. His confession needed to be right while in confinement because he was cut out for important work once that season ends.

Some parts of the world are beginning to open up. There are conversations in Kenya about opening up. However these go, we know that there is a tomorrow and tomorrow will look very different because of the last few months. The world will not be the same again, public gatherings will not be the same again, healthcare will not be the same. Politics will not be the same, economics will not be the same.

Whatever the world will look like, Jesus is calling the church to be ready. Because we will be needed to be in our place to declare the Kingdom of God to a new world. So a lot of our old confessions that we did not actually believe are being exposed as we are drawn into deeper confession and intimacy and worship. So if you are a believer, I am urging you to surrender to the work God is doing in you in confinement.

It's not about whether you think we should close down or not. It is not about whether it will end tomorrow or in a few weeks or in a few months. It is a posture of surrender, saying that however long this takes, God you are in control so in the meantime, show me what my confession really and bring me to a deeper, newer, richer confession that will ready me for what I am needed to do when the world opens up.

The word will need a church with a deeper confession, birthed in intimacy during confinement.

And as I finish, this encounter means so much to me. Jesus shows up, risen from the dead and full of glory but still has scars from the cross. He is showing us, God, with scars. Yes, the wounds do not hurt anymore but the scars are there. The scars tell the story of God's victory, that is glory.

Resurrection does not deny the cross, it vindicates it. You see, Glory is not shiny like we paint it, rather glory is weighty. Too heavy that it brings Thomas to see that he is before God himself.

The coming future will have scars from this season. It will be very different. Even though when God brings his healing it will not hurt anymore there will be scars. And the world will see a scarred church but those scars will tell the story of the victory of our God. Those scars will be the weight of glory. Your scars, from the past and from this season, will tell the story of God's victory.

And as Tom looks at his Lord and God he knows that it's okay if he bears the scars of his wounds, it's okay if this story carries on forever and he gets a new nickname, doubting Thomas, it is. Sac that will tell the story of God's victory. I imagine he went to every person he met and told that story. Because it was a scar that did not hurt.

Some of you are going to be taking your place in the Kingdom and the enemy will keep pointing at your scars. For abandonment, from broken marriages, from deep loneliness, from addiction, from struggles with mental health, bad life choices. And the enemy will be saying

you re not worth it. In a world where people spend tons of money to get rid of scars, that can be scary.

But Jesus is showing you that he has scars to this day, just like you. So go on and carry your new confession to your brothers and sister and the world around you. He is a God with scars. Because here is a promise he made that his strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Let's pray