

B Easter 02
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RCL

Locked Doors

In this month's issue (May 2009) of *Scientific American* is one of those articles that gives one shivers. It's entitled "The Planetary Air Leak" and is about how the atmosphere of earth (and of other planets) is leaking away into space. Because hydrogen is the lightest of the all the elements, molecules of it reach escape velocity from our planet and are irretrievably lost to outer space. The loss of hydrogen then has other nasty effects as we see in the rusted, arid landscape of Mars and the hellish heat and crushing atmosphere of Venus. Earth has held on to her hydrogen longer, but it is inevitably losing the gas and will eventually end up like our neighbors in space. I've put one picture from the article on the bulletin board showing the progression for our planet.

Gives me claustrophobia. I begin looking for escape hatches, doors to open to get away. I don't want to die young! Then I catch myself and say, "But wait, that's not going to happen for three billion years!" Whew, saved by the bell! It's akin to those articles about the life-span of the sun, that say the sun will eventually expand, fry what's left of earth, and then blow up. Gives you the willies until you realize that it won't happen for another five and half billion years. Scientists say that our universe will continue to expand and grow colder until there is no life or energy left in it, hundreds of billions of years after the sun is history. Again, not something to worry about along with this month's mortgage payment – or even our grandchildren's mortgage payments.

I relate to you this minor episode out of my week to illustrate a perhaps-not-so-small concept: locked doors. When I read these fascinating articles about God's amazing creation, I feel like I am locked into a destiny with no escape. What I am physically in this body that I cherish so highly (and that is slowly coming apart) will return to the mother earth that gave me birth and those elemental parts of Mark and Mary and Morgan – hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, and trace elements – will eventually be blown apart and be scattered into outer space.

So, what's the use? What's the use of anything? Why bother? Inquiring pessimists want to know.

I wonder if that is the way the disciples felt on that long ago spring morning in Jerusalem, the morning we read about in today's gospel (John 20.19-31). They are locked away behind physical doors because they are afraid. But the mental and spiritual doors must be no less forbiddingly barred. They have placed all their bets on Jesus, and He is dead. Not only that, but every one of them abandoned Him in His hour of need, and each of these disciples will have to live with that betrayal the rest of their lives. The future looked grim, both outwardly and inwardly, and their locked doors more like prison than protection.

Into this locked airless claustrophobic prison came the Lord Jesus. I'm not sure that was good news to the disciples, at least not initially. Who is this, a dead man who can come through locked doors? A ghost, a zombie, a what? And if He is the Jesus who once walked with them and died on that gruesome cross, He must be infuriated at the disciples' cowardly betrayal in His last hours. The resurrected Lord Christ could easily have been bad news for these simple folk, locked into a situation far beyond their comprehension.

But that's not the story we have, is it? This resurrection *is* good news. This resurrected Christ is not furious, but forgiving. He is not a flesh-eating zombie but a life-giving mystery. He gives them His own substance for their lives, body and blood He said, soul vitality and sacrificial solidity. They are not punished for their transgressions but commissioned to bring the whole world into this new reality.

This new reality is one where locked doors do not matter, whether they be physical or mental or spiritual. The power of God working in the Lord Christ makes locked doors irrelevant. God is always there, even in the darkest, loneliest times. And His presence is not condemnation but salvation, a way out of the constriction that holds us back from the greatness that we can be.

That constriction is what we call sin, and it has bad press with modern people. We think of it in moralistic terms, of thundering, hypocritical TV evangelists making us feel bad for just being ourselves. But sin is so much more than morality. It is that, of course. Real evil occurs in idolatry, infidelity, lying, cheating, gossip, murder, and all the rest of the ten commandments. But sin is larger than morality and ethics; it is all that would hold us back from being the greatness that God intends for us. It is the inability of our mortal natures to last the eternity that God wants. It is the weakness of a planet that is leaking its air, a sun that will someday consume itself in a monstrous explosion, a universe that cannot save itself from ultimate entropic death.

Into these locked rooms comes God in our Lord Christ. He breathes Himself into us, throws open the doors, and sends out into the sparkling sunshine to tell the whole world – and ourselves – of God's marvelous intentions and God's incredible power. We are not confined to a dying universe. We have been taken into a new horizon, a new state of being, where there is no limitation. The limitations of time and space and human life and human breath are transcended. Salvation has come to this house, yours and mine and every one's.

This means that we can live in the midst of dying lives, of dying planets, of dying universes, with an unconquerable optimism. Christ is alive. Christ is unconfined. Christ is taking us into a future and destiny unconstrained by all that depresses us now.

Leaking planets, unstable suns, cold universes, locked doors, dead-ends, betrayals, sin in all its incapacity – these are all irrelevant now. The resurrection of Jesus has made them so. Into this resurrection you and I and every creature of God is called. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.