

Late that same day, the first day of the week, when the disciples were together in the upper room behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them. 'Peace be with you!' he said; then he showed them his hands and his side. On seeing the Lord the disciples were overjoyed. Jesus said again, 'Peace be with you! As the Father sent me, so I send you.' Then he breathed on them, saying 'Receive the Holy Spirit! If you forgive anyone's sins they are forgiven; if you pronounce them unforgiven, unforgiven they remain.

Upper Room:

a place of commitment –you don't just wonder in and out.

customers who go to the upper floors

of department stores are making a commitment;

a place of privacy and intimacy.

a place of safety – no one can see you from the street,

you can hear people approaching up ladders, up stairs.

You can make it even more safe by locking doors,

turning off the stair lift.

You can shut yourself off from the world.

For fear of the Jews:

Disciples frightened

that what they did to him they might do to them.

Ironically there might have been another gathering

that night in another upper room

where the doors were locked by the Jews

for fear of the disciples!

But the phrase 'the fear of the Jews'

has haunted 20 centuries,

and made frightened communities

do terrible things to each other in the name of fear.

The words above the gate at the Auschwitz death camp were

Arbeit macht frei – work makes you free.

The words should have been

φοβω των Ιουδαιων – for fear of the Jews.

A further irony is that the disciples themselves were Jews.
Often it's what you lock in rather than what you lock out
which is the real threat.

They had utterly betrayed the Lord of their life,
the man who meant heaven and earth to them.

What you are capable of
can make the spirit soar
or the spirit shudder.

Of course Jesus himself was a Jew.

They locked the doors to keep him out,
stop him getting in and settling the scores,
getting his own back on those who let him down so very badly.

Resurrection wasn't a promise to them:
it was a terrible threat.

My dad talks about a gravestone in Ashover, Derbyshire,
where the widow inscribed on her husband's tombstone

At Peace

until I come.

He came.

Despite the locked doors

he came and wished them Peace.

In the midst of utter turmoil

with hands and side still wounded from the terrible cross,
he said Shalom, Peace.

There is something bigger than all your fear,

something that not even death can conquer,

something not even death can separate us from.

And that something is God and his love for you.

But he doesn't leave it there.

A nice warm feeling to dispel the chill of fear.

He sends them out

to spread his message,

to share his life,

with power to forgive sins

or not to forgive sins.

So the this upper room 2000 years on.

What are we locking out tonight?

Whom do we fear?

Other people?

Ourselves?

Even God?

Our risen Lord breathes

Peace on all that.

Whose sins do we forgive this night?

Whose sins do we pronounce unforgiven?

Is it a sort of conjugation?

My sins are only minor

and I deserve to be forgiven.

Your sins are more major,

and I'm not so sure you deserve to be forgiven.

His sins are beyond the pale

and definitely are unforgivable.

Against our conjugation of hate

our Lord sets another:

Father forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.