

*After hearing of an empty tomb earlier in the day,  
the frightened disciples have locked themselves in a room only  
to be surprised when Jesus appears and directs them to go and do what he has done.  
This encounter is first about fear and then about the difference between belief and faith.  
Faith is inspired by Spirit which is not about proof of anything, but a way of life.*

It was now the evening of that famous morning -  
when Jesus was missing from the tomb.  
We don't know anything else about the day.  
But - by evening the disciples - are behind a locked door –  
because they are afraid.

And suddenly – there he is!  
And - after the excitement settles down –  
he tells them to do something.  
He tells them to go out and do the work he has been doing.

You can imagine how well that went over?  
“I don't think so.”

And then he breathes on them and says - “Receive the Spirit.”  
It reminds me of the first few lines of Genesis -  
where God breathes over the waters.  
Jesus breathes spirit into the disciples.  
And he informs them that it is their turn  
to do the work he has begun.



But Thomas was not there –  
and the story quickly changes  
to the one who missed out on the experience.

Thomas hears about it later.

And - he needs proof – needs to poke around on Jesus -  
put his fingers into the wounds.

He gets the opportunity – and then he believes.

But - Jesus tells him that he has missed the point.  
It's not so much about believing or proving anything.

It's about the Spirit I blew into you - to give you faith.  
Spirit is more of a living thing than a believing thing.  
Faith- as a result of Spirit - is more of a living thing  
than a believing thing.



Being followers of Jesus did not begin as a *belief* kind of thing -  
says Harvey Cox in *The Future of Faith*.<sup>1</sup>

Cox defines three broad periods of history for the church.  
The Age of Faith characterized the first three centuries.

Jesus' followers during his lifetime wanted him to become a king -  
recalling the stories of David – but this was not to be.

Those followers who had visions of a military victory  
either fell away or shifted their thinking.

It was his presence that was compelling.  
After his death – his presence was still compelling.  
He lived on in their hearts and minds.

Even though he did not fulfill the role  
many people had envisioned for him -  
he gave them a way of living  
and a way of serving the world.



The message of the kingdom of God communicated that  
there was more to live for than Rome  
or even the religion of the temple  
and the society in which they lived.

It was a message against hypocrisy  
and a message of authenticity.

It was time to learn how to heal the sick.

It was a message of peace and a message of shalom.

It was a time to lift up those who were oppressed.

It was time to help the poor out of the circumstances  
that cause poverty.

But that very message  
was a threat to the rule of Rome and established religion.

It was a threat to the powers that were comfortable  
with their status and their excesses.

Before long there were persecutions  
aimed at many of these growing communities of Jesus' followers.  
Even so – it was a vital time – a time when "the way of Jesus"  
caught on and grew in diverse ways  
and diverse styles of learning and worship.

To be a follower meant to live in his Spirit –  
embrace his hope – and follow him – or be carried by him -  
to do the work he had begun.



That reminded me of *The Laws of Spirit* by Dan Millman -  
and the chapter about the *Law of Faith*.  
Milman writes that the *Law of Faith* is about trusting  
that there is an inherent love and intelligence  
working through you and all creation.<sup>2</sup>

It's is one of the greatest stretches –  
one of the greatest leaps - a human being can take.

Milman's book is a series of conversations  
between a traveler (like you or me) and a teacher whom he calls the Sage.  
The traveler asks how to take this leap of faith.



The sage sits down as they walk the mountain path  
and says to the traveler -  
“What if you suddenly knew with certainty  
that a higher intelligence was working through you  
and everyone else for the highest good of humanity?

What if you suddenly knew that there was a purpose  
for every pleasure and hardship?”

The traveler thinks about it and answers:  
“If I knew that – it would make a difference.”

And the sage replies:

“The *Law of Faith* doesn’t require you to believe this.  
But - it guides you to live your life as if this were true.

And – if you do this -  
it will change your perception and experience of the world.



This takes us right back to our story for today -  
and that famous image of Thomas  
who needs proof so he can believe.

Believing will be important  
after Emperor Constantine makes Christianity  
the religion of the Roman Empire.  
Being Christian will be marked by what one says they believe.

It will be required.  
And it will become a religion about Jesus – not a religion of Jesus.  
Generally speaking that will last about 1,500 years.

The Age of Belief finally began to be dismantled  
during the Enlightenment – and as Europe became more secularized -  
and even in the work of John and Charles Wesley.  
You might say they helped bring back hand and heart  
and the presence of the Spirit as a guide.

But – not now – not now with these disciples -  
when he breathes the Spirit into them.  
Belief is not as important as Spirit and Faith.



Now – let's return to the disciples who had closed themselves off  
because they were afraid.

Fear does that.



Where it quickly takes me to is about 1893 right here in this church -  
built three years before -

at the height of the silver mining era in 1890.

It had every new technology.

This great room - designed by the architect -  
and built by the masons and artisans -

for worship and music and building relationships that matter.

Within three short years the bottom fell out of the silver market  
when Congress ended the Silver Purchase Act.

Imagine it. Feel it. Hear the conversations.

Talk about a frightened group of people in a room.

Wonder what they did.

I know what they did.

You know what they did.

They breathed in the Spirit - just like you and I breathe it in today.

Sometimes we fall victim to fear.

Sometimes we think we will fail.

Sometimes we need to hear the Sage say:

“What if you knew with certainty  
that a higher intelligence was working through you  
and everyone else for the highest good?”

And the sage says:

“The *Law of Faith* doesn’t require you to believe this.  
But - it guides you to live your life as if this were true.

And – if you do this -  
it will change your perception  
and experience of the world.



How does that make a difference in our lives?

Our lives at home – or our lives at work -  
our lives with the people who love this little church



So – what does all this have to do with  
frightened disciples behind locked doors –  
suddenly surprised by the presence of Jesus?

Jesus breathed into them an attitude that affirms  
that inherent love and intelligence working through them –  
and you and me – that we call God.

Can it help you personally – me personally?  
Can it help us as a congregation to be more relevant to our community?  
Of course it can. It gives courage. It gives confidence.  
And even optimism.  
It gives faith in what can be done.

We do a lot of hiding out in our lives –  
Sometimes we do it in our church.

We are sometimes afraid to do anything for fear of failure -  
and other times we are afraid of success.

And yet in another way we hide out -  
waiting for the chance to do something worthwhile.

The disciples got their chance. That's for sure.

We have ours too.

We have it in relationships.

We have it in opportunities for learning and service -  
and even in our presence and activities in this community.



What I want to suggest is for us all to think of what frightens us  
and what we need to do about it.

Picture yourself on a path with the Sage  
when she reminds you that there is a higher intelligence  
working within you for good.

Or picture Jesus walking right through the wall of your fear -  
breathing new life into you and evaporating old excuses.



I believe that if we can do these things -  
we will have the sense – have the Spirit -  
of what is going on in this story for today.

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey Cox. *The Future of Faith*. Chapter 1

<sup>2</sup> Dan Millman. *The Laws of Spirit*. p 51