

Easter 2 A Sermon
John 20:19-31
April 7, 2024

“Safe Behind Locked Doors”
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¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear. Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As God has sent me, so I send you.” ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” ²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” ²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” ³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

A certain woman was at work when she received a phone call that her daughter was very sick with a fever. She left her work and stopped by the pharmacy to get some medication. She got back to her car and found that she had locked her keys in the car. She didn't know what to do. The woman looked around and found an old rusty coat hanger that had been thrown down on the ground, possibly by someone else who at some time or other had locked their keys in their car. Then she looked at the hanger and said, "I don't know how to use this." So she bowed her head and asked God to send her some help.

Within five minutes an old rusty car pulled up, with a bearded man behind the wheel. The woman thought, "This is what you sent to help me?" But, she was desperate, so she was also very thankful. The man got out of his car and asked her if he could help. She said, "Yes, my daughter is very sick. I stopped to get her some medication and I locked my keys in my car. I must get home to her. Please, can you use this hanger to unlock my car?" He said, "Sure."

He walked over to the car, and in less than a minute the door was opened. She hugged the man and through her tears she said, "Thank You So Much! You are a very nice man." The man replied, "Lady, I am not a nice man. I just got out of prison today. I was in prison for car theft and have only been out for about an hour." The woman hugged the man again and with sobbing tears cried out loud, "Oh, Thank you God! You even sent me a Professional!"¹

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Raise your hands if you've ever locked yourself out of your car? I have too. How about a dorm room? I have too. How about your house? I have too. How about your church? I have too. The truth is, I once had to break into my own house through a second story window!

¹ "Locked Car Door," Christiansunite.com: http://jokes.christiansunite.com/Crime/Locked_Car_Door.shtml#google_vignette.

Locks and me, we have a very tenuous relationship. Not true of Jesus. Apparently, locks were no trouble for him at all...

Following her encounter with the risen Christ on Easter morn, John's gospel tell a somewhat different story than the one we heard last week from Mark's gospel. Instead of fear and amazement and silence, in John's version Mary Magdalene went straight to the disciples with the wonderful news. "And what do the disciples do in response to Mary Magdalene's proclamation of the risen Jesus, of abundant life, of a world forever changed and open with possibility? They hide in fear behind locked doors."² But that didn't stop Jesus. Apparently, locks were no trouble for him at all.

In the often-insular culture of 21st century America, we, like the disciples, can tend to isolate ourselves from perceived threats. In fear many Americans arm ourselves with weapons, install locks on the doors, and security systems to guard homes. We cling to the safety of familiar neighborhoods, of close-knit social groups, and nuclear families.

We not only isolate our bodies to protect them, we sometimes isolate our hearts, our minds, and our spirits from the advances of a world seemingly bent on doing us harm. We can build walls around our emotions, our feelings, our truest selves. We can hide who we are in the safety of an internal stronghold because we believe that the world can't hurt what it doesn't see.

Even our churches have, in many cases, sought to build a protective barrier around their buildings, buttressing them against the onslaught of real-world "dangers" like poverty, like homelessness, like hunger, like racial tension, like need. David Bartlett, retired Yale professor, once said that: "We sing 'A Mighty Fortress is our God,' but what we mean is 'A Mighty Fortress is our Church.'"³ But the truth is, we like locked doors.

² Jaime Clark-Soles. "Commentary on John 20:19-31," Workingpreacher.com, April 23, 2017: [https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/second-sunday-of-easter/commentary-on-john-2019-31-12#:~:text=Presumably%20%E2%80%9Cthe%20disciples%E2%80%9D%20\(again,in%20fear%20behind%20locked%20doors.](https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/second-sunday-of-easter/commentary-on-john-2019-31-12#:~:text=Presumably%20%E2%80%9Cthe%20disciples%E2%80%9D%20(again,in%20fear%20behind%20locked%20doors.)

³ Ibid.

They make us feel safe from the threats, real or perceived, that imperil us from every side, even as many churches falsely claim that “All are welcome.” But locked doors didn’t stop Jesus.

You can almost imagine the scene: the large, rough wooden door of the disciples’ little keep was barred with a great hewn beam, the windows were latched, the lamps burned low casting foreboding shadows around the dimly lit chamber, the disciples huddled in the far corner around the plank table and spoke in hushed tones, glancing about furtively, uneasily. Then, without ever noticing his arrival, Jesus spoke into the tense near-silence: “Peace be with you.” His words cut the thick air like a knife slicing through cheese. The disciples’ faces drained of color, their lips aquiver. Without another word, he showed them the wounds in his wrists and in his side. Trepidation turned to joy. It was Jesus!

Before they had a chance to ask him when, or why, or even how he came to be with them, he spoke again. His words rushed over them like a deep exhale: “Peace be with you. As God has sent me, so I send you.” Then, he was gone. They were alone, hiding once again in their little fortress and knowing that’s not where Jesus wanted them to be. They had been sent forth.

The truth is, when we’re afraid and hiding out, all locked up, like the disciples were, Jesus’ voice comes *to us* in the midst of our fear and says, “Peace be with you.” Regardless of the doubts that churn in our minds, the failings that trouble our consciences, the pain and worry that bind us up, the walls we’ve put up or doors we’ve securely locked, Jesus’ voice comes to us, intrudes on us, and says, “Peace be with you.” Whatever hunger or need we feel deep in our souls, Jesus’ voice calls us to the table of community, feeds us well, and sends us out into the world to *be* justice and peace, salt and light, hope for the world.

As Christians, we don’t get to stay inside behind closed doors. The Christian life is not one of living behind high walls with locked doors and barred windows. The walls and locks and windows become tombs of our

own making. In our post-Easter world, resurrection beckons us to renewed life beyond—for ourselves and our communities and our world. In Jesus’ words, “Just as God has sent me, so I send you.” May we have the courage to unbolt the door.

*May we learn to open in love
So all the doors and windows
Of our bodies swing wide on their rusty hinges.
May we learn to give ourselves with both hands,
To lift each other on our shoulders,
To carry one another along.
May holiness move in us
So we pay attention to its small voice
And honor its light in each other.⁴*

Amen.

⁴ Dawna Markova from Prayers for Healing, Newbury Port: Conari Press, 2020.