

“Unlocked Doors”

2nd Sunday of Eastertide

John 20:19-31

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From the Pulpit

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Prayer for Illumination: In the quietness of these moments, O God, come to us and open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit. Open us to the power of the risen Christ in this place, in our lives and in the world. Amen.

A traditional greeting on Easter Sunday goes something like this....I say “Christ is Risen” and you say “Christ is Risen Indeed!” So in case you missed it last Sunday....Let’s try. Christ is Risen. **Christ is Risen Indeed**. Now with gusto...*Christ is Risen. **Christ is Risen Indeed**.*

After a solemn Holy Week of reflection and worship, we celebrated in joyous fashion. There was a lot to celebrate. There were shouts of Alleluia! **There was brass and choir, don’t** forget the flowers and triumphant Easter Hymns. And it was glorious. But the week after Easter—there’s **the true challenge**. **What’s different?** The routine goes back to normal. The hectic pace of life resumes. Meetings go on. Kids back in school. We are back in full swing.

The text this week moves us quickly from empty tombs and shouts of *Alleluia* to locked doors and fearful disciples. Gone is fresh aroma of the lilies and in its place is the stale air of the disciples’ waiting room.

You return today to hear the rest of the story---or at least to ask an important question or two. While the Easter story is fascinating, **“What’s the point? Is there even a point?”**

It is a question addressed in the text this morning. It is Easter evening. After the public execution of Jesus, his closest friends and followers do the practical thing: they go into hiding. Someone finds a safe house in Jerusalem, a room big enough for all of them, a sturdy door with a strong bolt. They are, hiding in that room, and have been there since Friday afternoon.

There they are, lying low, trying to be inconspicuous, waiting for the uproar surrounding the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus to settle, afraid that if they are seen publicly they would be identified as his friends, arrested and crucified.

They are stunned. Shocked by the empty tomb and the report from Mary Magdalene that she in fact had seen the Lord. They have every reason to be afraid, every reason to lock the doors. They are grieving the death of their dear friend and they fear for their own lives. They fear Jesus and what would happen to them if they encounter him. So they lock themselves away.

There are days when I would much rather stay locked in the house. A well-deserved day off. A cold, rainy day. There are days, when I prefer to just stay in bed, pull the covers over my

head, and close out the world. Some days it seems easier and safer to lock the doors and avoid the circumstances and people of our lives. Sometimes we just want to run away, hide, and not deal with our reality. When we feel threatened and on guard the natural thing to do is to hunker down and lock the doors, to become focused on our own security rather than anything that life has to offer.

When my friend, Angela, **found out she didn't get tenure and promotion** upon her academic review, she was devastated. In the fog of what a new reality would be, she struggled to hold it together. She stayed in, locked herself in her apartment. She **didn't answer email. She didn't respond to calls.** For her own survival, she **didn't engage.** She kept the blinds closed and had food delivered for more days than her refrigerator could hold. She was imprisoned by the fear that she would never regain **standing as an academic again.** She **couldn't imagine the day** after tomorrow, let alone weeks or months in the future.

There are more stories like Angela's. A couple experiences a pregnancy loss. A spouse grieves a partner. A couple locked in a miserable marriage. A community spirals downward when the manufacturing plant moves. A congregation closes its doors. **We don't have to look very hard at any door of our friends or family or church folks to find some sort of pain or suffering**

behind it. Most of us are locked in prisons of fear of one thing or another.

But we all know that isn't a life. Being locked in because of our fear isn't a life that God calls us to have.

Something happened on that Easter evening when the risen Christ sneaks in that locked room. Something happened that none of the disciples would forget something that made all the difference in the world, something that changed everything they thought they knew about life and death. When Jesus shows up he offers his peace. "Peace be with you." He offers it a second time. He assures them that "As the Father, has sent me, so I send you." And then he breathes into them the Holy Spirit.

In his way, Jesus reminds them that they **can't stay in the** room. They have to get out of the room. They have to get out of the space that they have used as a shelter from their fear. They have to get out and into the world. So Jesus gives them his life and his breath – to get them up and moving again. To be sent means that, despite their fear, the disciples have to get moving toward the door; into the street; and depart into a new and profoundly different world.

Just by showing up and breathing the Spirit into them and giving them the call to Go and Serve, Jesus gives them life not bound in fear but released for something new.

Back to Angela... With the help of friends and a mentor, Angela unlocks her doors. She eventually takes steps outside, re-engages in groups and with friends. She begins to reevaluate her academic and life pursuits. The act of taking the next step brings her a renewed purpose.

Above the Broad Street entrance of this church are these words, “*Enter to Worship, Depart to Serve.*” Men and women long before us believed that an encounter with God in this place dare to propel us back out into the world to serve and witness to the life changing power of this Gospel message, be it an Easter Sunday or any Sunday thereafter. We come in to experience the risen Christ, to encounter the ways that God is feeding us and filling our cup, and then we are sent out of the building and into the world.

But here’s the thing – those doors where the disciples were; they were locked. **They’ve been locked because of fear.** Jesus **doesn’t unlock the doors for the disciples, he didn’t force them** into a world of which they were afraid. He simply joined them where they were, greeted them and stood with them.¹

¹ Amy Allen, sermon preached at LSTC, 2007, <http://www.lstc.edu/chapel/sermons/?a=sermon&id=29>

Jesus stands with us, too. Wherever we are. In the midst of whatever fears consume us. In our lowest moments. When **we've misjudged another person or allowed our prejudice to overpower our compassion.** When our own isolation and fear cause us to withdraw. Jesus enters in, and breathes new life into us. **But he doesn't unlock the door.** Jesus calls us to do that for ourselves. In the act of taking the next step of our faith journey, we lean in to our fears; we work on the relationships that are broken; we strive to live out that Easter message that **death doesn't have the final word.**

In a little while, we are invited to take another step on our faith journey. Jesus shows up again. In the lives of his friends, in the word and in the waters of baptism and in the bread and the juice. When we come to the communion table to celebrate and remember the gift given to us, we encounter the risen Christ. Jesus keeps showing up.

In the next fifty days during the season of Eastertide watch for Jesus to show up. **Jesus can't be stopped by any locked doors** on our homes or in our hearts. Jesus comes to us as he came to the first disciples, right in the midst of our fear, pain, doubt and confusion. He comes speaking peace, breathing into our anxious lives the breath of the Holy Spirit and encouraging us in our journey.

That is very Good News.

Christ is Risen. *Christ is Risen Indeed.*

*Amen.*²³

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² Sermon title inspired by Michael Marsh <https://interruptingthesilence.com/2011/05/03/unlocking-doors-a-sermon-on-john-2019-31-easter-2/>.

³ Grateful for a sermon read a few years ago from John Buchanan, 4th Presbyterian Church, Chicago, entitled, "Sent" that helped frame the role of disciples in the text.