

Lockout

John 20:19-31

INTRO:

The typical response to the resurrected Christ among his closest followers is fear. We fear the new life and the demanding discipleship that he brings us in his resurrection. But the good news is that he breaks down our locked doors and shows himself to us, empowers us and sends us to do what he has called us to do. He sends us to loving service for and with others.

ME:

I think I would have been scared by the resurrection. Jesus had died, we all saw it with our own eyes. Then as we are maybe starting to come to terms with it all, the women come and say they have seen him alive and they told us all that he said. **So, what would I do with that news? What did the disciples do with the news?** We are about to find out.

YOU:

How do you handle your fear? How would handle the news the women gave to the disciples? Would you head out to see if it's true? Would you lock yourself up in a room because of you fear and uncertainty?

Let's pray before we see how the disciples handled the news...

GOD:

John 20:19–31 (NRSV): 19 When 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 of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So 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.”

26 A 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.” 27 Then 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.” 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But 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.

WE:

John's Gospel ends with a series of three resurrection appearances. We just saw the second and third appearances in our text. Easter Sunday we saw the first.

The opening verse sets the mood. The disciples are hiding behind locked doors. We are even told they are locked in because of **fear**. We don't know why they were gathering, except out of fear or the Jews. **Isn't it curious?** Those they are afraid of are actually their friends and relatives who were now mocking them because their Messiah had died such a humiliating death.

I wonder if they are afraid because of Mary Magdalene's announcement to them that Jesus has been raised. Only the beloved disciple and Mary Magdalene have **seen** and **believed** up until now.

Let's focus on the fact that Jesus' disciples react to the crucifixion with fear, hiding behind locked doors. Let's also focus on how Jesus seeks out those fearful disciples right after his resurrection. He **moves** to them, **appears** to them, and **empowers** them to do his work.

Some other day we can focus on Thomas and his doubts. Though I will comment on how people become blind to their having shut Jesus out like Thomas was blind to his own lack of faith. He doesn't even acknowledge that he has a lack of faith. He may not even realize it or that this has locked out Jesus.

I wonder if Jesus will come to Thomas anyway and give him what he needs to jump off the precipice of faith? *Spoiler alert!* Jesus does do that!! **I wonder if Jesus will come to you and to me to reveal himself when our little faith locks him out? *Spoiler alert! No, just wait and see for yourself! But I think you'll like it!***

Let's focus on the disciples as a whole and what Jesus does to them and for them. The ones locked in **fear** become . . . the ones locked in the **loving arms of Jesus**.

Fear is real. Once a man was talking to someone about how his "**security business**" had skyrocketed after the terrorist attacks on September 11 in the United States. This was a bit strange because the man's "**security business**" was really just locks, burglar alarms, and stuff like that. But after 911, everybody needed to go out and buy a better set off locks, a better set of security alarms. Even though none of these provide any protection against a terrorist attack. But that attack in the United States put everyone in a mood in which we desired security above all else.

I never lock the doorknobs of there is a deadbolt. **Why?** *Because if somebody can get through the deadbolt, then they can get through the doorknob lock!*

Any good police officer would compliment your work of installing a shiny new deadbolt. But they will also remind you that a good and serious thief has lots of ways to get around them. And that really they are only good for the installer's sense of security.

Locks come in all shapes and sizes. They are not only found in hardware stores. It is normal following some trauma, when you've been violated by some injustice in life, to lock yourself away.

An inner city teacher said her greatest challenge was, day after day, looking into the eyes of her high school students and seeing students who have simply shut down. They have failed so often, had doors slammed in their faces so many times, they withdrew into their own heads.

It is like they have locked the door and thrown away the key.

*The teacher said, **My whole teaching is involved in desperately searching for some key that can unlock the mind and give me some entrance into their soul.***

It is important to realize that in our text it is the disciples who are the ones who have **closed** and **locked** the doors. This is not a story about how the world locks its doors to the claims of the Christian faith. This story is about

the way those of us who are Christians lock our doors. And in locking our doors out of fear of the world and what it might do to us, the irony is that the disciples have locked their doors to Jesus and what he might do to and for us. The irony here is that the soldiers of Caesar were not trying to get to the disciples, and the critics among their friends and family were not trying to get to the disciples in order to mock them. **Do you remember who was trying to get at them through the locked doors?** It was Jesus who was trying to get to the disciples in order to bless them, to give them peace, to forgive and empower them.

But when we lock our doors, it is not a problem for Jesus. *That is the Good News of Easter!* Death could not hold him down for long and our various locks cannot keep him from getting to us.

He gets through the locked doors. He shows his wounds and scars to us if that's what we need. To those who are afraid of his talking revenge on them he says, **"peace be with you."**

So there is a bit of irony here. The doors have not only been locked against the possibility of invasion by the governmental authorities, not only been locked against the unwanted knocking of family and friends, but the doors have also been locked against the intrusions of the risen Christ. The risen Christ will not be locked by death in the tomb, and he will not be locked away from his people, the church.

Our attempts to lock Jesus out and to secure ourselves against his intrusions are probably unintended. We didn't know that we were locking him out when we stayed away from church, when we avoided signing up for the Bible study, when we found ourselves too busy to pray. But we were.

We didn't know we were locking him out when we kept our faith safely tucked away within ourselves, when our religion became something that we practice only in the pews an hour a week, rather than out in the world where we work, and shop, and play. We didn't know we were locking him out, but we were.

Let's not end by beating ourselves up about this and rushing to unlock the doors to the church and to our hearts. Let's go back to the Gospel and let's end with the promise we find there. Here is the Good News. Just as the risen Christ was not stopped by locked doors, so I promise you that he will not be stopped by your shiny new deadbolts. *Not that he is a thief!* Our God is wonderfully resourceful, imaginative, persistent, and determined to have us. Even in our so-called lostness, even in our betrayal, the first thing he does on Easter is come to get us!

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

No matter how we try to lockout Jesus, he will come to us and help us with what we need to do what he calls us to do

YOU:

Do you think you intentionally lock Jesus out? If not intentionally, do you unintentionally lock Jesus out? Jesus will come to you anyway.

CLOSE:

Many Easters ago, everyone was talking about the strengths and weaknesses of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. Some people liked it, and some didn't. I read that someone in a discussion about the movie said,

“My brother has been alienated from church for over a decade. He is now a third-year law school student. The other night he called me and asked me to recommend to him a good church in our area. I was shocked. I wondered why he had now developed this interest in the church. So I asked him. And he replied, ‘I went to see that movie, The Passion. And it really got to me. I can’t describe what happened to me, but now I just know that I am being drawn back to the Christian faith.’ ”

The risen Christ is infinitely resourceful, determined, and imaginative in coming to get us!

Don't you feel it? Don't you believe it? Even now, even in this sermon, in this service, here at this Church, as you depart into your daily life. He is coming out to get you. *There is no sure defense against Jesus!* There is no way to secure yourself against his intrusions. He is coming.

Jesus Christ is risen! Alleluia! Jesus Christ is coming for you and for me.

Let us pray about this together . . .