

Sermon Easter 2 2022

Every year on this Sunday, we hear the same Gospel, which is John's telling of the story of Easter Day and the first Sunday after Easter Day. And while Thomas often gets most of the attention, today is really all about the heart of our faith—about who we are and who God is; it's about what we can and can't do; it is about the metaphor of locked doors.

The disciples are hiding behind locked doors because they're afraid. They're afraid of the religious leaders; they're afraid of the crowds; and they're probably afraid of a Messiah who has come back from the dead and who just might want to settle scores with a bunch of cowardly disciples who had, quite literally, left him hanging on a cross. For whatever reason, the doors are locked and bolted firm.

There is a whole industry built up on locking doors. Our church is locked during the week. It breaks my heart that our doors are locked. Why? Because, like the disciples, we are fearful. We are fearful if we don't, people enter the church and damage the wonderful interior or steal its furniture and objects. As we gather here our homes are locked and secure. We hope no-one can get in and that our possessions are secure. But our fear continues, and so we install alarm systems to warn us when someone is breaking into our house or our church, because our insurance won't pay out unless we have first done everything possible to deter potential thieves.

Now don't get me wrong, I am not stating that we should all remove our alarm systems and unlock our doors at all but let us be honest and own up to the reality that fear is the foundation of our security concerns.

Today I want to put the two together, today's Gospel and the metaphor of locked doors, for I want us to explore the things that keep us inside and limited and away from fulfilling our God given potential. We all have our personal locks, things like fear and doubt and anger and resentments, things

like our own personal history, our own wounds, our own self-righteousness and pride, and, of course, our own sin.

In many ways, this is the natural human condition. We're all like this. Part of what it means to be a human being, to be a person in the world, is to live behind closed and locked doors—sometimes it's because that's what we want, sometimes it's in spite of what we want, sometimes it's even though we desire desperately for ourselves and our lives to be different. In all its complexity of forms, this is part of what it means to be a person. One fancy term for it is alienation, being separated, in fundamental ways, from the natural world, from each other, from God, and from ourselves.

There are all sorts of ways of talking about this reality. It underlies the entire Biblical story. Alienation is an aching for wholeness that's always just beyond our reach. St. Augustine says the human heart is restless, all by itself. Others say that we are created with a hole in our souls, a hole that has the shape of a cross, and that we will never be complete until that hole is filled with the one thing that fits it, Jesus Christ.

Living behind locked doors is another image of the same thing, another way of describing the reality of alienation that is as fundamental as it is painful. We can so often find ourselves as scared and miserable as the disciples in their locked room, our doors locked and bolted.

Also, note that so much of what we do when we are at our worst comes from trying to fix this emptiness on our own. We end up fitting bolt upon bolt, lock upon lock, until the door is so locked and bolted that we have no idea where to begin to start to unlock the door.

So much of the really dreadful stuff we do to ourselves and to each other is the result of realizing that there's something wrong—and trying to find a person, or a program, or a pastime, or a substance, or a belief, or a new thing, or more of something, or a whatever, that will be the key to unlock the door

of the room we realize we're in, or make us comfortable and happy, or at least numb and pain-free, while we continue to live in it.

But these never work, not for the long haul. We discover that not only do the keys not fit but also that we can't unlock these doors all by ourselves. When we try, we just make a bigger mess than we started out with.

Easter, of course, is about the fact that God comes through the locked doors and offers us himself and his peace. Christ gives us his love, and he offers us the possibility of faith, and of new life. And it's all a gift—bursting through our locked doors. In the gospel story, the disciples don't do anything noble, heroic, or even mildly admirable. Remember, the last things they showed Jesus were their backs as they ran away. The last thing we heard from Peter was his denying three times that he even knew Jesus. After that, the disciples just hide out. That's all they do. But Jesus bursts through the ultimate locked door, death itself and rolls away the stone of the tomb, the very barrier to new life and new hope and then he seeks out the disciples, comes through their locks, their bolted doors and he offers them peace. Wow! This is what Christianity is about. We get stuck on the cross, Christ offers us the resurrection.

And look what happens a week later. Jesus again appeared to the disciples. Notice what they have not done that week. They have not rushed out sharing the good news of the resurrection. No. They have kept the doors locked, and what's more they have failed even to convert Thomas—the testimony of the entire church wasn't persuasive or compelling enough to convince the one person who really wants to believe. (In fact, this isn't really a story about “Doubting Thomas”; it's a story about the unpersuasive disciples.)

And once more, the Lord comes to them. Once more, he comes without conditions, without demands, without recriminations, and without rancour. Even though the doors are locked; even though they haven't done a single thing worth writing home about; even though by low Sunday they haven't

added a single convert—still, the Lord comes to them, and, like God over the form of Adam in Genesis, continues to breathe his Spirit into them, and to make new life possible.

For all of our struggles to find something to fix us, to fill the holes inside us, to get ourselves out of the prisons we find ourselves in, for all of the effort and for all of the tragedy that are so often a part of that search—the answer turns out to be not a task for us to accomplish, or a truth we have to learn, or a ceremony we have to perform. The answer is that little heart slid under the door, an impossible presence in a locked room. The answer is a gift we are offered and invited to receive.

Maybe low Sunday, with its “back to normal” reminder that we aren't always quite as wonderful and as potent as we might be led to believe after a magnificent Holy Week and Easter, maybe this is a good time to remember that we really don't have to do anything. We just stand there, afraid, behind locked doors.

What really matters, the healing of our pain and of the world's pain, the great promise of rest and peace and wholeness, is a gift, it is grace. And we do have to do to anything. God does everything. For there are no locked doors that can withstand God's love for us. There are no alarm systems that can hold back God's grace for us. For God, the locked doors of our hearts hold no barrier to God's immeasurable love, grace, generosity, and hospitality. They might just as well be wide open. So today, find the key, unlock and throw open the door, and welcome Christ's immeasurable love in. We can't keep God's love for us out so let's welcome God's love in and let us respond like Thomas before us with ‘My Lord and my God’.