

Locked up, locked away, locked down. It is not a pleasant metaphor. Especially if you are on the wrong side of the lock. Locks are often the tools of the fearful and insecure. They protect peace when it feels fragile, or possessions when they feel threatened. And on this second Sunday of Easter, our Gospel text is full of locks—locked doors, locked hearts, and locked minds. You can almost hear the deadbolts and padlocks clanging shut in this text. What does the resurrection of Jesus have to say to these locked doors and locked lives, both in the first century and in the twenty-first century? Let's see.

**First, the locks of fear** guard the doors of the room where the disciples are hiding, but Jesus passes the locks and the doors and stands in the midst of the group as if the disciples were standing in an open field. How disconcerting this must have been for those fearful disciples who trusted in the power of their security system to protect them from sight and surprise approach! John's Gospel tells us that the disciples were hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. In other words, they feared for their lives, for their reputation, for their chance to re-enter a normal life now that Jesus was dead. Behind these locked doors the timid disciples must have been surveying their options. Could they return to Galilee to fish and collect taxes as before? Would the Jewish authorities recognize them as accomplices to Jesus? Were they marked men in the streets, or could they simply slink back into the anonymity of the crowd and return to their former lives? Ah, how fear magnifies every sound and every anxious thought! How the normal sounds of the street below must have sounded like the approaching steps of Roman legionnaires? How often did the wind outside the window sound like the whispered approaches of spies?

Have you every noticed how much time and energy in life we waste fearing things and events that never come? What a waste, what a sad waste of the precious gift of life, is lost locked behind the door of fear! But Jesus comes to the room locked up in fear. He bypasses the locks and the doors to appear in the very middle of our hearts, dispelling the fear that had gripped us, and banishing it to the periphery of our space. "Peace," Jesus announces to the fearful disciples, and to us. Peace overcomes the fear, like a sudden light turned on in a dark room pushing the shadows to the corners of the room. Are you locked up in fear today? Are you spending enormous amounts of energy hiding and protecting and dreading the unknown future?

The risen Lord comes to us all, as he came to the disciples, to banish fear with his presence and peace. He knows our hidden places, our hidden secrets, our hidden fears, and Jesus has come intimately close into our very hiding place to set us free again to live and love and serve in the daylight.

**Second, this text shows us the locks of guilt and failure** on the hearts of the disciples. What was it like to be one of the disciples in that room after the crucifixion of their Lord? Did they talk about their failure to live up to their brash claims only days ago that they would each die for him rather than betray him? Or did they simply rehearse over and over again that utter failure in individual silence? We do not know. But we do know that Jesus came into that locked room to unlock more than the doors. He came to unlock the hearts of his disciples, imprisoned in the memory of their recent failure. Jesus spoke to them about forgiveness of sins, both theirs, and the sins of others like us who would also follow Jesus with inconsistent steps. Forgiveness is a powerful force, and Jesus had come back from the grave to let us all know that our failures do not have the final word to say about any of us. Jesus came back to restore them, to forgive them, to invite them back into the dance. Isn't that good news for all of us who have failed? Each of us have our own times we stepped on the toes of a partner, or stumbled and fell at the crucial moment in the dance. And we thought we are out forever, banished like dismissed celebrities on *Dancing with the Stars*. And then Jesus shows up, and we hear the incredible news of grace that is called "forgiveness."

**Finally, John's Gospel invites us to step beyond the locks of doubt.** One week went by, and the disciples were already full of hope and new life after seeing the risen Jesus, and receiving the gift of forgiveness. But Thomas was not there on that first Easter night. He heard about the appearance of Jesus, and he could see the transformed demeanor of his friends, as the shackles of fear and guilt had fallen from their hearts. But Thomas was one of those people who did not borrow other people's faith. He had to experience everything for himself. And that is not a bad thing to say about Thomas, or any of us. Notice that Jesus does not scold Thomas for his approach to faith. Jesus knew that each of us must come to faith in our own way. For some the path to faith is almost painless and easy. But for others, like Thomas, faith does not come easily or simply. It must be tested, felt, experienced, and challenged, in order to be real. Thomas stands at the head of great line of believers in this regard—Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Pascal, C.S. Lewis, to name just a few. But doubters can become

locked up in their doubt and questions. And so with tenderness and persistence, Jesus comes to set Thomas free too.

It is a sweet sound to hear any lock click open. What has you locked up today? Is it fear, or guilt, or doubt? Hear the good news: whatever the lock, **Jesus is the** key; and he has come back from the grave to set you and me free. That is good news, indeed! Hear Jesus call out to you: Peace be with you!

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