

## **All Locked up**

Menno Mennonite Church  
April 27, 2025

**Purpose:** To understand the power of fear as a dynamic in faith

**Message:** Even when we respond with fear, Jesus finds us and offers us peace.

**Scripture:** John 20:19-31 (I will read); Revelation 1:4-8 (Please read)

**Synopsis:** Among the many curiosities of the Easter story (and there are many when you spend enough time thinking about it) the response of the disciples are among the most perplexing. They have heard the good news—the best news really. Christ is arisen and has been spotted in the immediate area. Their response? Lock the door. Curious indeed.

Many times what holds us back in life and in faith is the fears we hold of what could be and what might happen *if*. As many times as we lock the world out, we also lock ourselves in. Yet within all that would inspire us to fear, Christ comes and bids us not to be afraid, but to find courage beyond our fear, offering us peace. How are we invited into God peace even when we are most afraid?

## **John 20:19-31 CEB**

<sup>19</sup> It was still the first day of the week.

That evening,  
while the disciples were behind closed doors  
because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities,  
Jesus came and stood among them.

He said, "Peace be with you."

<sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.  
When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy.

<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.  
As the Father sent me, so I am sending you."

<sup>22</sup> Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

<sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven;  
if you don't forgive them, they aren't forgiven."

<sup>24</sup> Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve,  
wasn't with the disciples when Jesus came.

<sup>25</sup> The other disciples told him, "We've seen the Lord!"

But he replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands,  
put my finger in the wounds left by the nails,  
and put my hand into his side, I won't believe."

<sup>26</sup> After eight days his disciples were again in a house  
and Thomas was with them.  
Even though the doors were locked,  
Jesus entered and stood among them.  
He said, "Peace be with you."

<sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. Look at my hands.  
Put your hand into my side.  
No more disbelief. Believe!"

<sup>28</sup> Thomas responded to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"

<sup>29</sup> Jesus replied, "Do you believe because you see me?  
Happy are those who don't see and yet believe."

<sup>30</sup> Then Jesus did many other miraculous signs in his disciples' presence,  
signs that aren't recorded in this scroll.

<sup>31</sup> But these things are written  
so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son,  
and that believing, you will have life in his name.

We have to wonder: Why didn't they go looking for him?

Earlier that day—we are given the timeline throughout here—they got the best news possible. Mary had burst in and let them know that the stone was rolled away and the grave was empty. That sent a couple of them on a run to the tomb by Peter and the disciple Jesus loved initially to confirm the story. When Mary, later, having remained at the tomb in wonderment of what was going on and she meets the gardener that turns out to be Jesus and she goes and tells them that she has actually seen Jesus and spoken to him they respond differently. Their master was alive and spotted in the greater Jerusalem area and they keep their seats and go nowhere.

Why didn't they go looking for him?

Why was an empty grave and mystery somehow more intriguing and convicting than an actual sighting and conversation of the one they most loved. It doesn't hold water. If I told you that I had run into your long-lost child at the grocery store looking at the ice cream selection, I am guessing there would be no rest for you until you had scoured the surrounding area in the even slightest chance that it might prove true. Here? Not a whole lot. The text says that they believed that he had risen. That they had seen and believed. Where they dismissing the evidence of someone who they might be inclined to lay aside? We can find all sorts of reasons for disallowing the evidence that we just don't want to. Was there eye rolling and raised eyebrow or two? Or is Something else going on?

Why didn't they go looking for him?

Did they believe Mary's story just fine but were not at all sure where to start? Or did they think that maybe Jesus was, as a matter of fact, *nowhere* to be found? After all, the last thing Jesus said to Mary, and which Mary no doubt reported to the disciples, is that he was ascending to his Father. Did they conclude that this would happen that very day? Did they think he was *already* back in heaven (wherever that was) and so it would be fruitless to go hunting for Jesus? It doesn't seem too likely; a bit too organized and comprehending of the situation for a group of folks that John has told us repeatedly didn't understand what Jesus was saying most of the time. Even were there some hope, even a nominal search would seem prudent.

Why didn't they go looking for him?

It's a hard question to answer with absolute certainty, and there is a lot of room for conjecture. But we do have a good clue in the obvious: the door was locked. The door was locked because they were afraid. They were afraid of the Jews, the writer says. But when you

think about it, that doesn't seem all that terribly credible really. There really isn't evidence that there was a large campaign to contain the followers of Jesus once the leader was gone. The logic of power didn't seem to give the movement that much consideration: simple removal of the head should suffice to make the group wither away. Besides were they concerned about being encountered by the powers that be, running to the center of their attention—the place where they had laid Jesus—would seem supremely ill advised, So why did fear lock them in a room when resurrection is in the air? What kept them from trying to find out whether all of this is true?

There are many possibilities, greatest among them I think was their fear of running into Jesus himself. Think about it. Not only were they not sure what was going on and what it could all possibly mean, they also had to cast their memories back to a few days before and at least entertain the recollection of how things went down with Jesus when they last talked. They would have to remember how it felt to realize that their bravado of following to the very end came to naught. Peter would have to remember the feeling in the pit of his stomach when he heard the rooster's crow. We can reasonably consider that Judas wasn't the only one of the disciples to look at what they have done and wonder whether their end hadn't come. And not just the one's who we have on the record for failure. All the disciples swore up and down that they would rather die than be separated from Jesus. But Jesus went away and here they still are. It's not as though the end-result of that abandonment had been something minor like Jesus getting booked on a misdemeanor charge, fined \$500, and sentenced to 90 days of community service. The penalty Jesus got was on the stiff side. They had watched the crucifixion from afar, and to a man they knew they were somehow complicit in what happened.

Why didn't they go looking for Jesus? I think it is because they were rather afraid of what it would mean if they succeeded and found him. The resurrection day that begins with mourning ends with confusion and fear behind locked doors.

We know something of locked doors. It is somewhat emblematic of the human condition. We spend a lot of time dealing with the locks of our lives starting from our property all the way down to that which we hold in our hearts. All our doors have locks on them, perhaps several layers of doors between us and the outside world—with good reason. It's the last thing we check before putting ourselves to bed, making sure the doors are secured and locked. This is of course prudence to be sure. We lock the world out when we cannot be on the lookout ourselves. But sometimes we also lock ourselves in just as carefully all the same.

Our inward locks are far more comprehensive and protective. We refuse to go out because we are ashamed, too blue, too uncomfortable, or too what ever to want to have to deal with the scenarios of the wider world. We check our identifications to see if we want to answer the phone or not. We can hold on to the long ago slights and stories well past their usable shelf life, occasionally with the story becoming the far greater circumstance than what ever transpired in the first place. We allow hurt, shame and fear to dictate what we do and do not do far more than what we acknowledge. We lock ourselves in just as often as we lock the world out.

Shame and fear are first cousins. When we carry shame on ourselves, you know that we can be seen by people who, we assume know exactly what we are feeling and thinking. Then we confirm that assumption by catching the glances and side long looks that may or may not have any bearing whatsoever on what we are feeling, but, because we have locked ourselves into the archetype of shame and fear, they are focused like a laser beam to do their corrosive, destructive work. Shame reinforces itself, confirming that it is precisely what we deserve and what we ought to be held to. Please hear me: this is not the preacher calling out to the peanut gallery with an imagination to whom I am speaking to (something which some types of shame can lend itself to as well). Every last one of us holds something within us whose discovery we would dread to come out. Every last one of us has that which makes us feel unworthy. It is among the most comprehensive tools that the adversary has to keep us from knowing who we really are, and more so, to whom we ultimately and finally belong.

If that first Easter dawned within the lamentable sadness of death's reality in our world then that same day ended with the lamentable sadness of shame. The disciples were ashamed of what they had done and failed to do. They were ashamed of the cowardice that they carried. They were ashamed that their intentions and their actions seemed so irreconcilably separate. So they locked the door, telling themselves they were keeping the Jews out when maybe they were keeping themselves locked in. But then Jesus did what he always does for anyone locked up in his own shame: he comes in anyway. He enters the room, he enters the heart, he breaks into the shame.

Jesus comes and stands before them and does so as many times as is needed to make sure that it is fully and finally understood. He comes beyond the locked doors and pronounces that which they most needed to hear: Peace; and offers them the Holy Spirit to make all things new. Jesus doesn't say a word about their actions. He doesn't overtly say "forget about it" or "I

forgive you”. Instead in the gift of the Spirit he conveys not only is everything of course forgiven but also empowers their very mission to go about spreading forgiveness as they go. He is empowering them to not only unlock themselves from what binds them but also those to whom he is sent. We are invited into this same work, for ourselves, yes. But also to share this beyond our locked worlds with those who are also invited into this same freedom and hope.

Does a simple sermon unlock us out of sheer rhetorical power. I wish it would, for my own sake as much as being impressed by anything I have to say. We must acknowledge that most of the time this is very much a work in progress. We would not question the goal of Easter being freedom such as this. But we also know that this unlocking resurrection is not the work of just three days. Many times it is the work of a lifetime and beyond. Even if we are ready to be unlocked, we are just as likely at the end of the day to wonder if such a thing is possible with shame like OURS. Many times we need to go to the grave and find it empty many times before we can start to actually live it. Among the hardest thing for us to believe is that Jesus would come to US and offer peace.

One of the more famous images of Scripture comes from that line in Revelation when Jesus says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” Ordinarily when someone knocks at a locked door at your house, you know that it’s up to you to get up and unlock the door and open it. The good news of Easter is that even if you are too afraid to do that, too ashamed or too paralyzed by this or that feature of your own life, the lock won’t stop Jesus. He will appear right in the middle of your locked-up heart and before you even have the chance to say or do a blessed thing, he will say “Peace to you!”

Why didn’t they go looking for him?

It doesn’t matter. At the end of the day Jesus always comes looking for us, and stands in the locked places of our hearts offering us peace and new life of the Spirit. Jesus give us peace, and the world is forever changed. Thanks be to God.