

Behind locked doors of Unbelief

Text: Acts 5:27-32

Revelation 1:4-8 (Series C, 2nd Sunday in Easter) Ps. 118:14-29

John 20:19-31

It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you," he said. After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord.

Let us pray:

When you came into church this morning you passed from the narthex through the double doors at the back into the sanctuary. Were any of those doors locked? Except for those who were the first to arrive, those doors were unlocked and you walked straight in, picked up your Bulletin and a hymn book as you made your way into the sanctuary.

If the doors were locked and remained locked, of course, we wouldn't be here right now. It happens every now and then that when people want to get into the church, they find that all the doors are locked and they have to go hunting for a key.

Why do we have so many locked doors? Because we are afraid. I would dare say you locked up your house before you came here this morning. You locked it because you don't want someone else wandering in and sorting through your stuff, and taking what he or she wants.

I hope you locked your car out there in the parking lot or out in the street. We are advised to lock our cars even in our own driveways at home because thieves can be so bold as to take our cars from right under our noses.

I know of the days when we would leave our houses unlocked without any fear of anyone entering illegally. Once churches were left unlocked so that anyone at any time could come in for a quiet time of meditation and prayer. That doesn't happen anymore because we are afraid.

The first disciples had locked all the doors why? "Because they were afraid of the religious authorities. "They hid behind locked doors –

- *for fear* of what the authorities might do if they found them meeting in the name of Jesus;
- *for fear* of being identified with the supposed criminal who had been violently executed a few days before;
- *for fear* of being treated as Jesus was treated – being beaten and crucified for being a heretic or a traitor.

To keep the outside world out, they locked the doors. But it made no difference. Jesus just walked right in. He walked right in and he said to them, "*Peace be with you.*"

We know that *Peace* and *Fear* are the direct opposite of one another. We know the feeling of fear, that's why we are so fanatical about locking everything. We know from experience that if we don't lock up others will come in uninvited.

We are so fearful that if we suspect that things aren't locked up, we will turn the car around and go home again to double check. We don't have any peace of mind until we do that.

Jesus came among the fearful disciples and said, "*Peace be with you*". Peace is not so much a state of mind as a state of being. Peace is a gift. It is a gift from God. Peace is a calmness and quiet even in the midst of danger. Peace is not escape from danger but faces it and still feels at peace. Peace is the absence of fear.

Often, I witness this kind of peace when a Christian faces his/her last days. They have a peace that comes from knowing that it is well with their soul and Jesus is their saviour and he waits to welcome them to eternal life.

But peace is something that was not felt in that locked room. The women had seen the empty tomb and heard the angel's message, "*He has risen from the dead*". The women had run from the scene, both overjoyed and terrified. They found the disciples cowering behind locked doors.

Even with the testimonies of Peter, one unnamed disciple and Mary Magdalene who witnessed the empty tomb. Still, they continued to hide behind the safety and security of the locked upper room.

They were afraid before the announcement of the resurrection. They were still afraid after they had seen and heard the good news that Jesus had risen from the dead. In other words, it seems that not a great deal had changed because of the Easter news.

After church services ended last Sunday – Easter Sunday, what did we do? Did the story of our Lord's resurrection change our lives in any way? Or did we simply go back about our business, content to leave Easter where we had found it - inside the sanctuary where we had worshipped?

Is not every Sunday supposed to be a reminder of Easter, thus a Sunday of Easter? You have probably noted by now that the Bulletin says that this is the Second Sunday of Easter.

It is not the Second Sunday after Easter as if to say that Easter is finished with and these are the Sundays that follow. This is a Sunday of Easter. This means that the Easter celebration is continuing.

To put the question plainly and simply – how have our lives been different because of last weekend? Many who attended church last Sunday experienced a rush of Easter Joy because the church was full of singing and flowers.

But when it was all over, some returned behind locked doors of *disbelief, doubt, fear, guilt, faithlessness* and *lack of conviction*. They celebrated Easter, but nothing has really changed. What about us who are here almost every week, what has changed in our lives because of the events that took place last weekend?

Did the resurrection of Jesus change our lives in any way or did the holiday on Monday and then back to work on Tuesday make us content to leave Easter where we had found it – in the church where we had worshipped? Jesus Christ rose from the dead to bring us peace, to make changes in our lives that are drastic and lasting.

We see that happening in the life of Thomas in the Gospel reading today. With the other disciples, we presume he had heard about the empty tomb and Mary Magdalene's experience. He was even told how the other disciples had seen Jesus enter the locked room.

Thomas remained unchanged. *"Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe."* The risen Lord appeared again a week later and invited him to put his fingers in the scars on Jesus' hands and to feel the wound in his side.

Suddenly Thomas was changed from doubt to a firm faith. Finally, Easter had sunk in and Thomas' life was changed and cried out "my Lord and my God". In fact, all the disciples were affected by the Easter victory and came out from behind locked doors and began to preach the good news to all who would listen.

Easter changes people's lives.

- **We** see the power of Easter as we repent of our wicked ways, and the new life and faith that we were given at our baptism shines through as we seek to show love and care in everything we say and do.
- **We** see the power of Easter when two people, who have not spoken to each other in a long time, are reconciled. Easter peace replaces all bad feeling and hostility.
- **We** see the power of Easter at work when faith is no longer a take it or leave it matter. The Christian faith isn't just something for Sundays or Christmas and Easter. We are changed. Like Thomas, we are led to a commitment, and a trust in Jesus that affects us everyday in everything we say and do.
- **We** see the power of Easter in the person battling a terrible illness, and receiving peace of mind, knowing that the risen Jesus provides the strength and the help they need in this time before they enter eternity free of pain.
- **We** see the power of Easter when know someone who is having a hard time, go to them and visit them and be sure to pray for them.
- **We** see the power of Easter when we reach out to someone who is in difficulty, invite them to come to church with us.
- **We** see the power of Easter when we know someone who is really struggling to hold on - someone who is *despairing*, reach out and touch them and tell them

how much you care, and bring them - urge them - to come where at least two or three others who believe have gathered in Jesus' name.

- **We** see the power of Easter at work as Fear is banished and replaced with the assurance that when we close our eyes for the last time we will be with our Saviour and God.
- Easter gives the peace from knowing death is not the end, but the beginning of something far better than we could ever imagine.
- **We** see the power of Easter when you meet someone who is an answer to a prayer that you never uttered, the words become real and they change things for you.
- Easter gives us *hope* and Easter gives us *faith*, it gives us the strength we need to get through the day.
- **We** see the power of Easter as we part take Jesus' body and blood in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. It is not the dead Jesus that we take into our bodies but the risen Lord.

Fear of God's anger and punishment are replaced with *Easter Peace* - our guilty consciences are made clean; our sin disappears; we are forgiven. Easter isn't just one day on the church year calendar to be celebrated once a year.

For the skeptics and atheists and those who just aren't sure, it is true that we cannot *prove* the *fact* of the Resurrection by judicial standards. Neither can we *prove* that it didn't happen.

Easter is a way of life. The way we believe. The way we relate to one another. Fear will keep us behind closed doors of unbelief, but Easter replaces fear with *Peace*.

Blessed are you, says Jesus, when you have not seen and yet have come to believe; and indeed you are! Therefore, let us lift up your heads and walk up straight as children of the Most high, we are Easter people. And march forth in peace. **Amen.**

April 24, 2022

Prayer concerns: *Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Shirley Walker, Hanne Bourgeoise, Sven Berg, Astrid Hylland, Ellen Eriksen, Euclide & Ellen Dahal-Lanteigne, Karen Abazio, Wilhelmina Tiemersma, Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Soo Young, Shirley Walker, Pastor Timothy, the dire tension between Russia and Ukraine, Protectors at various places in Canada, Covid -19 patients, essential and Frontline workers, Note: of thanks to God as the Covid-19 virus is easing off and more restrictions are being lifted, and finally Families of departed souls in recent weeks and months.*

Prayer: Lord God in Christ, Who is, Who was, and Who is to come, release us from the limits of our earth-bound minds freeing our souls to seek our life's fulfillment only in You, our Alpha and Omega, our Source and our Completion. We ask through the immeasurable wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and the unwavering love of our Almighty Creator, who together with You reign as One God, in glory and dominion, forever and ever. **Amen.**

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- **Good Christian Friend, Rejoice and Sing # 385**
- **This Is My Song # 887**
- **A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing # 393**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Karen Langer, Peter Bateman, & Euclide Lanteigne

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

n/a