Have you ever thought about how many locks are in your life? I got to thinking about all of the locks in my life after reading, earlier this week, this familiar story we have just heard about Jesus’ disciples hiding behind locked doors. In any given day, I deal with a multitude of locks—the most obvious being the locks on the doors to our home. Of course, there are also the automatic locks on my car, standard on most vehicles these days. There is the locked door through which I enter the church each day and the locked office I come into every morning.

Then there are the locks that may not be so obvious: the password protected locks on my computer, my e-mail accounts, and other websites where I store important information. Of course, I cannot forget the lock on my bank accounts that can only be unlocked with my pin code. I even thought about the safety lock on a bottle of Tylenol I might open for help with an afternoon headache.

There are also locks I must negotiate, in any given day, for which other people have the keys for entering. I must go through locked doors to gain access to the intensive care unit of the hospital. There are the locks on the doors to other people’s homes, who I might be visiting. There are codes and security measures that must be taken to visit people in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. I could go on and on, boring you with the locks I deal with on a day-to-day basis. I would venture to say that each of you, here this morning, could reciprocate in the same way.

Locks are such an everyday part of life, anymore, that they often times go unnoticed. In fact, in reading the story of doubting Thomas more times than I can count, I had never thought much about the disciples locking themselves away for “fear of the Jews.” In interpreting this text, I had always focused on the lack of faith being expressed by Thomas and Jesus’ response to him: “Blessed are those who have not seen, but have come to believe.”

However, the context of this story is very important. It is night, a dangerous time in nearly any city, but especially for Jesus’ followers in the city of Jerusalem, after the weekend of terrible violence worked against him. There is fear of the scorn of friends and family. The disciples of Jesus had come forth to follow him, had risked it all, and believed that he was the one who would redeem Israel. They were naturally fearful of the

---

1 John 20:19
2 John 20:29b
mocking ridicule of all those who said, “Some Messiah! Where is your Lord and Savior now?”

Perhaps I never thought much about the disciples being locked away in fear, in this story, because they are exactly where I would have been, had I been in their shoes: safe and secure behind locked doors. That is the thing about locks, isn’t it? They make us feel safe. They provide that sense of security that helps us believe we are out of harm’s way.

I read this week about a minister who, years ago, proudly self-installed a new set of deadbolt locks on the church’s parsonage. A policeman member of the congregation said to him, “Preacher, unfortunately those locks are mainly for you, not a potential thief. Any serious thief has got lots of ways to get around those locks. If, it makes you feel better, fine.” The minister wrote later, “Well, those locks did make me feel better until the policeman said what he said.”

I think I felt somewhat safe and secure in interpreting this particular story because it is such a familiar one. I had locked myself into understanding this particular text only one way. Nevertheless, I think the policeman in that church is on to something: locks are not foolproof. While they may make us feel safe, they are not always the solution to our security problems.

Thus, I tried unlocking this text in a different way this week, concentrating more on the reasons for which those disciples are hiding behind locked doors. I could not help but reflect on how we, as the church, might hide behind locked doors. I wonder if we still, in many ways, lock ourselves away with locks that come in many different shapes and sizes and are not just those found in hardware stores.

Do we hide behind locked doors in our church buildings, hoping that people different from us with new ideas will not find us, join in membership, and change the dynamics of our ministry, be it our worship, our programming, or even our mission? Do we lock the doors of the church either literally or symbolically, by making it difficult for people in the community to gain access to our building for fear they might break something or cause some kind of damage? Do we lock up, in our bureaucracy and Roberts Rules of Order, the capabilities to do certain kinds of ministry or do ministries in a particular time frame? While locks are certainly a necessity anymore, I can’t help but worry that sometimes locks inhibit more than they help.

Growing up, I remember my parents enforcing, very strictly, a “no locked door policy” in our home. My dad always reminded me that if a fire happened in our house, in the middle of the night, and my door was locked, he might not be able to get to me in time to help get me out of the house. Even though locks are meant to provide safety and

---

4 Willimon, 18.
5 Willimon, 18.
security, and always installed with the best of intentions, sometimes locks end up having an adverse effect on that for which they are intended. The great challenge of locks is to be sure that you are locking out those who mean you harm, while at the same time not imprisoning yourself!

While putting more locks on the church, increasing our security tighter and tighter, and hiding away behind locked doors might seem like the safe or secure thing to do, in the process, we might also be (unintentionally) imprisoning ourselves within. Locks inhibit accessibility to relationship and community. Locks fasten shut, close tight, and seal off any potential for reconciliation and forgiveness. Locks prevent possibilities for ministry. Locks restrain us behind closed doors, rendering us incapable of living the mission Christ calls us to.

So, thank God for the Jesus of Easter!

For it is the risen Christ who appears among his disciples, in this particular story, despite the locks on the door, and says to them, “Peace be with you.” It is the risen Christ who shows them his scars and wounds and again says to his disciples, “Peace be with you.” It is the risen Christ who then breathes on them the Holy Spirit and says to them, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

No matter how tightly we may secure our locks against the world and no matter how safe we might feel behind locked doors from what may lie on the other side, Jesus defies all barriers, all obstructions, and all blockades. Just as death could not hold him in the tomb, so our various locks cannot keep him from getting to us.

Not only does he get to us, but he blesses us, gives us a sense of peace that cannot come from any lock, and then empowers us with the Holy Spirit to go out into the world, unlocking doors, breaking down divisions, removing blockades, and continuing the ministry Jesus began. This is the good news of Easter!

However, I read one minister’s commentary this week that did not end on this note and I think his point of not ending here is a good one. A faithful attempt at interpreting this Gospel text cannot end on only an exhortation about coming out from behind our locked doors in order that we might unlock the hearts of others in the world. While I believe this to be an important message, I think a sermon on this text must end with a promise.

The good news of Easter is, just as the risen Christ was not stumped by the locked doors behind which the disciples cowered, so I promise you that the risen Christ will not be deterred by any locks that we have put on the doors of our lives or our church. Our God is wonderfully resourceful, imaginative, persistent, and determined to have us.

---

6 John 20:19-22
7 Willimon, 18.
Even after the disciples had denied him, even after they had fled in fear, even as they doubted his resurrection, the first thing that Jesus does at Easter is to come out and get them. Thus, no matter how broken the church may be, no matter how stifled our ministry may become, no matter how flawed our perceptions are of what it means to follow in the footsteps of Christ, the first thing the Jesus of Easter does is to come out to get us.

In fact, I believe even now, even in this sermon, in this service, here at this church, as you go forth in your daily life, he is coming out to get you. There is no sure defense against Jesus. There is no way to keep yourself safe and secure against his intrusions. He is coming.\(^8\) So again, thank God for the Jesus of Easter—the one who comes to save us from lives lived behind locked doors!

Amen.

\(^8\) Willimon, 20