

“Did You Grow Up in a Time of Unlocked Doors?”

John 20:19-31

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Did you grow up in a time and place where doors were left unlocked? I did. Perhaps our doors were locked at night, but I don't remember it. At least I never saw anyone use a key to enter our house. Whatever the time of day or night we arrived home, we merely walked in.

I'll let you in on another secret. Jackie and I rarely locked our doors until we moved to Atlanta. When we sold our home in Somerset, we scrambled to find keys to give the new owners. As a matter of fact, we had to change a few locks in order to have keys to give them.

After Jesus was crucified, the disciples were not nearly as trusting of others. On two occasions, John tells us that they assembled behind locked doors, Easter and the following Sunday. In spite of the fact the door was locked, though, Jesus entered the room where they were and spoke to them. You may recall on the second visit, Jesus had that dramatic dialogue with Thomas where he invited Thomas to touch his wounds, which led Thomas to declare, “My Lord and my God!” No higher confession of faith was made by anyone in the Gospels.

In reading this passage last week, my attention was drawn to John's description of the locked doors. This was a detail that he did not want us to overlook. I suspect he wanted to use this fact to reveal something about Jesus' resurrected nature. No longer was he limited by time and space as he once was and we now are.

I am not ready to move on, though, past the locked doors. I think there is more here that needs to be explored and analyzed. Why were the disciples assembled behind locked doors and why did Jesus invade their privacy? What doors do we hide behind and what does Jesus want to do for us?

First of all, why were the disciples behind locked doors on Easter and the following Sunday? John said they were “afraid of the Jews.” Some of the religious authorities had Jesus crucified and who was to say they were going to stop there? I'm sure some of the disciples, if not all, felt their lives were in danger, too.

Why did Jesus invade their privacy? He wanted them to know that he needed them to come out from hiding and continue their work. There was a world full of people that needed to hear the good news of the Gospel and be transformed by it.

He also wanted to give them the courage and confidence they needed to do this vital work in a hostile environment. As a result, he gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit, fulfilling his promise to send the Paraclete to them. As Alan Culpepper states, “His act of empowering the disciples for their mission is almost a reenactment of the creation scene in Genesis 2:7.” Listen to his words that evening.

“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” John 20:22.

What a challenge and opportunity for a group of scared disciples. They certainly could not stay behind locked doors and do what Jesus needed them to do. Neither can we.

However, I see many people living behind locked doors in self-imposed prisons and it grieves me. **Why do they do it?** I think they do so for the same reason the disciples gathered behind locked doors after the crucifixion. They do so out of fear.

Of what are they afraid? **Some are afraid of getting hurt.** Perhaps they have been abused or mistreated and they pull back for fear of being hurt again. Others have had their hearts broken and they don't want to feel that pain any more. To protect themselves, they stay behind locked doors.

There are people that stay behind locked doors because they are afraid they will disappoint others. They do not think they can live up to others' expectations, which may be unrealistic anyway, so they remain in seclusion. They pass up challenges and opportunities to do good and achieve potential because of their fear of letting others down.

The fear of failure is so strong, isn't it? It can cause us to place severe limitations upon ourselves and keep us from taking risks. It can trap us in a comfort zone of mediocrity and boredom that becomes smaller each day even though we are unaware of it.

How many times have I listened to someone reminiscing about their life only to hear them say, "I wish I had taken more risks. I played it far too safe. If I had it to do over, I would certainly do it differently."

On the other hand, some people remain behind locked doors because they are afraid that others will disappoint them. They have been burned one too many times and can no longer place the confidence in people necessary for building relationships, working with others and accepting challenges. Their distrust of others and inability to believe in them force them to live on a lonely island.

I know people living behind locked doors because they are afraid others will take advantage of them. They fear being manipulated or exploited and so they play it safe. They stay in their little world carefully clutching their possessions and their fear.

I also know people living behind locked doors because they are afraid that someone may see the ugly or undesirable parts of their lives, their flaws, mistakes, doubts and confusion. They cannot handle this kind of transparency and work hard to conceal anything negative. Perhaps this was why Thomas was not with the disciples on Easter evening. His struggle with the darker side of his thoughts and feelings drove him to solitary confinement.

Along this same line, I know people that live behind locked doors because they think they deserve to live this way because of the mistakes they have made. Their guilt and shame have convinced them that they are doomed to live in a prison without bars. How tragic.

Garrison Keillor, the folksy host of *Prairie Home Companion* said, "We always have a backstage view of ourselves." About this, Craig Barnes, pastor of Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh wrote, "We let the audience see only the neatly arranged stage. But, behind the curtain all kinds of things are lying around: old failures, hurts, guilt and shame."

Barnes continues, "Nothing is more crippling to our souls than working at hiding shame. We lock up more and more doors, sealing off more and more rooms of the heart to prevent our true selves from being discovered. We think we are keeping the world out, but in fact, we are keeping ourselves locked in. At the heart of the Gospel, though, is the proclamation that Jesus Christ has come looking for us. According to John's text, he walks right through locked doors to find us. He shows us his wounds from the cross, which are the marks of our forgiveness. Then he says, 'Peace be with you. You are forgiven, peace is restored to your troubled soul and you are free.' "

I think I have a better understanding of the connection between the locked doors in this passage and Jesus' words about forgiveness. It is God's grace that can unlock our own prison door and lead to the liberation of others when we share our story with them. Truly, forgiveness is real, powerful and contagious.

Are you living behind a locked door today? Are you hiding from someone or something? Are you passing up opportunities and challenges that could make your life more fulfilling and the world better? Would you like to be set free? You hold the key in your hand. Receive the Holy Spirit this morning and with His help, put it in the lock and turn it.

