

THE LOCKED DOOR

Text: John 20:19-31
LHUMC 4/7/13

I. Introduction

A. Behold the door—An ordinary, everyday kind of object.

1. I have a hunch that if we ever counted how many doors we go through every day, we'd be amazed how many there are.
2. Just think how many doors you opened and closed and went through just to get here this morning.
3. But a door can be more than just a door. (Video)

B. Today we are talking about doors. Or more specifically, one particular door—that locked door behind which the disciples were found on that first Easter evening. That locked door through which Jesus appeared, not once, but twice.

C. When I read the story focusing on the locked door, it got me pondering what I've learned about locked doors over the years.

1. I've learned that if you lock the doors of a Honda Civic and leave your keys inside, it's not a good thing. When the tow truck driver shows up to get through the locked doors to get your keys, I can guarantee that if you are driving a Honda Civic, they will not be happy. (Both Megan and I have learned that Honda Civics for some reason are very hard to break into) I once saw a tow-truck driver work for almost two hours trying to get through a locked door of a Honda Civic. I heard some new words from him that day, too.
2. I've learned that if your key breaks off in the lock of a locked door, it's not a good thing.
 - a) My only unexcused absence from school in my whole life came the day when I was leaving for high school and my key broke off in the lock as I was leaving.
 - b) Since I couldn't get the door locked, and everyone else had already left, and no neighbors were home, and it was the time before cell phones, I literally sat on the front step of our house all day until my brother got home from middle school .
3. I've learned that you can never predict whether a church will have a locked door or not.
 - a) When we were first married, Annette was on staff at Central Lutheran Church in downtown Minneapolis where they had an

door policy, so you never knew who might be wandering around or sleeping in the church during the day or the night.

b) We've also been a part of churches in suburban areas kind of like this one where the doors were locked all the time and you had to buzz a buzzer to be let in. Go figure!

4. I've also learned that sometimes the locked doors that we use to keep others out or to keep ourselves safe are not this kind of door, but of the more spiritual variety. And I think the story of that first Easter is a classic example of the reality that there are locked doors, and then there are locked doors.

II. And if those first disciples had those kinds of locked doors, it is probably safe to say that we all have them. And as I've pondered their story and our story, I think "locked doors", whether we are talking literally or spiritually are there for two related reasons.

A. The first is "fear".

1. For the disciples, John makes it clear that that was the issue: "and the doors of the house where they had met were locked for fear of the Jews." Historians will tell you that it wasn't only the Jews they were afraid of, but the Romans as well, who were no doubt still out looking for the followers of Jesus.

2. For us, it's the same thing. We lock our doors at night because of a fear of who may be out there and what they may be looking to do.

3. And as to the spiritual kind of locked door, so often fear is why those kinds of doors are a part of who we are sometimes also.

4. I was reading an article by Craig Barnes this week where he said this: "When I was in grad school, my family moved to an apartment in South Chicago. When we saw that the door of the apartment had four locks, we wondered why we needed so many. I soon discovered that the benefit was mostly emotional. When we got inside at night, after being worried about whatever, we could shut the door on the world and turn lots of little levers. "Click, click, click." I think of that door when I'm listening to people describe how they cope with their fears. They are keeping their hearts behind a door with lots of locks because something out there makes them afraid. If someone tries to get in before they're invited, especially if their heart has been hurt before, they will hear the "click" of the lock... (Or) we keep our hearts locked up tightly because we know the truth about ourselves, and the truth is that we are not what we want to be, or even what we pretend to be... 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 that we are keeping the world out, but in fact we are keeping ourselves locked in.” (“Crying Shame” in *Christian Century*, April 6, 2004).

5. There is certainly plenty to be afraid of these days. Some days I watch the news and feel like going out and buying another deadbolt for our door to add to the one that’s already there.
 6. And as Craig Barnes says, there is for all of us, a lot of inner fear as well—because we have been hurt or betrayed before, if we have suffered some trauma in our lives, or simply because we know that we aren’t always who God would want us to be.
 7. And don’t forget that for those disciples, who had just betrayed, denied, and deserted Jesus, that locked door on the room that they were in was just a symbol for those other locked doors of their hearts. When you let Jesus down as spectacularly as they did, it’s only natural to “Click, click, click away” on the inside.
- B. And the second reason for locked doors is the false sense of security that they can give us.
1. Willimon tells the story of being really proud after self-installing a new set of deadbolt locks on the parsonage, only to have a policeman in his congregation tell him, “Preacher, unfortunately those locks are mainly for you, not a potential thief. Any serious thief has lots of ways to get around those locks. If it makes you feel better, fine.” And he then says, “Those locks did make me feel better until the policeman said what he said!” (*Pulpit Resource*, April 15, 2007)
 2. I believe that there also can be a sense of false security that comes from our inner locked doors as well.
 - a) For when we keep others out, or when we keep Jesus out of hearts, it is probably because there is a certain security that we are seeking.
 - b) We do so because we don’t want to change, or forgive, or expand our comfort zones, or stretch ourselves in our discipleship.
 - c) Because the truth is that we know from experience that when Jesus gets into our lives and our hearts, he tends to come with those kinds of expectations.
 - d) Over the next couple of weeks as we hear what Jesus has to say to the disciples as he keeps showing up after Easter, things like

“casting nets” and “feeding sheep”, I can guarantee that some of those things will tempt us to keep our doors locked—because casting nets and feeding sheep are not always easy or comfortable things to do for most of us.

III. Conclusion

- A. But here’s the thing—if we learn anything from today’s story, it is that when we lock our inner doors, it really does just offer us a false sense of security.
- B. Because if nothing else, today’s story teaches us that Jesus has the power to break through locked doors.
- C. Or as someone once said, “there is no way to secure ourselves against the intrusions of Jesus.”
- D. No matter how many locks we have put on those inner doors, that Jesus will break through them is not just possible, but inevitable.
- E. And the other thing that today’s story teaches us, perhaps the most important thing, comes in what Jesus did when he broke through that first door on that first Easter evening.
 - a) First, he said “Peace be with you.” If those disciples needed anything it was peace. Their lives the last few days had been anything but peaceful.
 - b) And then he showed them the marks on his hands and side—the marks that showed the lengths he was willing to go for their forgiveness. And if those disciples needed anything, it was forgiveness. For each of them had done or hadn’t done plenty for which they needed to be forgiven.
- F. And that is the promise—when Jesus inevitably breaks through our locked doors, he brings with him peace and forgiveness. That too, is inevitable.
- G. So today we give thanks that the risen Christ still has the power to break through our locked doors—the doors of fear, the doors of hurt, the doors of shame, the doors of guilt, the doors of broken relationships, the doors of comfort and complacency.
- H. And we give special thanks that when he does, he comes bearing the gifts of peace and forgiveness.
- I. And now as we gather at the communion table, we gather to once again receive those gifts through the receiving of the bread and the cup.