

John 20:19-31

“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear...” (vs. 19) How different, and how very sad this story would be if this is the way in which this narrative were to end - the disciples locked in out of fear. The story does not end this way for the disciples, but it does end this way for so many today. And this is sad, for it does not need to.

Very few people actually do what the disciples did on Easter evening - lock themselves within their house out of fear. This is a disorder. It is known as agoraphobia, and it's rare. What is not rare is the locking up of ourself within ourself; away from other people; away from God.

We get this naturally. It comes from our parents; our first parents. In Eden there were no houses, no doors, and no locks. Had there been, you can be sure that this is where Adam and Eve would have been hiding - behind locked doors, just as the disciples did on Easter evening. They hid, however, the best they could among the trees of the Garden. They hid for the same reason people hide today; the same reason the disciples hid on Easter evening: fear...fear because of God.

Were these men afraid of God? It says they hid behind locked doors out of fear of the Jews. The Jews who had arrested, tried, and crucified Jesus were more in number, and more powerful, than they. These disciples were bold in Gethsemane, Peter even drawing his sword when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus. But where was Jesus now? Crucified...buried. Resurrected? There were reports...rumors. But if He was alive, why wasn't He with them, and they with Him? It was not enough. And so fear took over and they locked themselves in.

What a way to live! In fear...hiding. But we justify it. I'm afraid to be around certain people, so I withdraw from them. But I blame them for it. They said something. They did something. That's why I lock myself up away from them. It's their fault. Church members who avoid their pastor; who avoid other members of their church family, are not to blame for locking themselves up away from the gathering of God's people; it's others who are to blame. That is how they justify their actions.

The same with the disciples. They would have justified their actions on Easter evening. Others were to blame for this. The Jews...even God. God was to blame for their locking themselves up.

Every fear that men have is ultimately fear of God, or (we can say) fear because of God. If God is on my side, why should I be afraid? If He is with me and for me, it matters not who is against me. But if God is not on my side, I should be afraid, and I will lock myself in.

On Easter evening the disciples were not at all assured that God was on their side. They had let Him down. They had abandoned Jesus in Gethsemane. They had denied Him. They had surely hurt Him very much. Why shouldn't these men be afraid of the Jews? They were not even sure if God was their friend or their enemy.

The Easter evening narrative does not end with the word *fear*. Here is how it reads: *“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’”*

Would their enemy have done that and said those words? Jesus came to them as their friend. He came as one who forgave them; who spoke to them the word of peace.

When someone has locked themselves in, it is impossible to reach them. They're locked within themselves for a reason. It's not by accident. And maybe they have been hurt by others; by someone close to them. People do not become afraid without due cause. We do not become afraid of God without good reason. We have hurt Him; more than we know. We have turned away from Him to go our own way. We have every reason to believe that God is not on our side, but that He is our enemy. And if God is not for us, why shouldn't we hide from others who are against us?

How is it possible to break through a locked door? A locked heart and life? *With God all things are possible.* "Jesus came," it says. He didn't knock. He didn't ring the doorbell. He didn't bust through the door. He came. He came to be with these fearful men. He came to speak the word of peace, and they were at peace. Their hearts became glad.

Friend, Jesus came to you in the water of Baptism to bring that same peace to you. To give you the assurance of His love. To forgive your sins. The locked doors on Easter evening could not keep Jesus away. The same is true of your Baptism. Our minds get all locked up as to how Jesus can come through simple water. We don't understand it. How can it be possible? Well, look at Easter evening with me, for this is as difficult to understand as Baptism. He did not climb in through a window. He simply came to them...doors or no doors; walls or no walls.

And how wonderful for them! For unless Jesus comes, there is no peace, no forgiveness, no life, no salvation. But all these gifts Jesus gives when He comes to His disciples.; when He comes to you.

But now we ask, since Jesus came to these men with the word of peace; since He came with assurance and forgiveness, and to release them from their fears, why did these same disciples lock themselves up again eight days later? Just one week after Easter, these men to whom Jesus came, crawled back into their same hole again. Why?

We see the same thing today. Churches all across our land should be as full today as they were one week ago. If the Risen Lord truly has come to us bringing peace, forgiveness, and salvation, and we believe it, why would we, like a pig who returns to the mud, crawl back into our hole again and act as though Easter, and our Baptism into the Risen Christ, was only a dream and not real? Jesus came again to His disciples one week later because sin, doubt, and fear came again to them. And this is why He keeps coming to you. Jesus is here again today in your midst; in His Word and Sacraments He is here to once again assure your hearts; to give you again His peace; to bless you again with His risen life.

Would your enemy do that? Jesus is your friend. He comes not to punish you - your week has been punishing enough; He come today, one week later, because you need Him. You need His peace for your heart. You need His strength for your life. You need His forgiveness. And this, all this, He gives you.

You are forgiven, my friend. Jesus says so. This is why He died and rose again...so that you would be declared His forgiven one in your Baptism. And this is who you are. You do not need to lock yourself up. Jesus is with you. He is on your side. The marks in His hands and feet, and in His side, tell you that God is at peace with you. Fear does not need to have a place in your heart, for you, my friend, have a place in God's heart now and always. Amen.