

Unlocking Doors

Second Sunday of Easter, Year C – John 20:19-31

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, April 7, 2013

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! [The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!]

Last week I told the whole gang some of the benefits of being the first-born of the Martindale clan. Another of those bennies was that I was generally a lap ahead of my siblings on the *bedtime* curve. Oh, sometimes, Danny, my next brother had the same bedtime as me. But usually I was granted the more-impressive-than-it-sounds-to-adults privilege of being the last one told to hit the proverbial hay. Until I was twelve, that meant that, by the time I slid into my designated portion of the trundle beds that filled the room I shared with my brothers, the other three were already sound asleep.

I remember laying in my bed listening to the soft, steady breathing of my brothers, and to the sounds of my Dad moving through the house, checking that everything was locked up tight for the night. Night after night, I listened to the squeak of the metal lever-latches on the casement windows that during the day let air flow through our pre-air-conditioning home. Night after night, I saw the yellow, bug-repellant light out front come on, even through our curtained window, just before the light in the hall was extinguished. Night after night, I heard the bolt slide shut on the front door, right on the other side of the wall where my head lay on the pillow. I remember hearing those sounds and feeling like I could, at least for a while, lay aside my pain, my fear, *even* my doubts. I remember hearing those sounds and *knowing* that, at least for the next few hours, my world was sheltered and safe and secure.

I guess it's possible that that's how Jesus' disciples felt about the locked door where they were gathered the evening of the day of the resurrection.

It had been a whirlwind of a week. Having spent three years following Jesus, having heard him over and over speak words of comfort and peace, having followed him in triumphant procession into the city, the week had ended with his arrest and execution – on a cross. Having been there when Jesus cast out demons, having been there when he gave sight to the blind, having been there when he cleansed lepers and even raised the dead, the disciples had had to hurriedly bury their master and friend in a burrowed tomb.

Now, having heard the women's report of radiant messengers proclaiming that their master was risen, it is possible, I suppose, that the eleven were comforted by that locked door as they huddled together in a room at the end of a back alley in Jerusalem. It's possible, I suppose, that that locked door assuaged their pain and their fear and their doubts. It's possible, I suppose, that that locked door made them feel sheltered and safe and secure.

It's possible, I suppose. But I don't think so.

You see, what I *think* is that locked door behind which the Disciples were huddled that evening of the first day of the week did *nothing* to make them feel sheltered. It did *nothing* to make them feel safe. It did absolutely *nothing* to make them feel secure. Having been with their teacher for three years, having walked with him along the back roads and the highways of Judea and Galilee and Samaria, having heard him preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God, having been part of his ministry and his miracles, having done all that, in the end, they had all run away. The door on that back alley room was not locked keeping the world out, it was drawing their pain and their fear and their doubts even tighter.

And the truth is, that's how it is with our *own* hearts as well, isn't it? Oh, there *are* times when we are comforted with the child-like safety and security of gathering our heart around us like a cozy comforter. But more often than not, the fences and the walls and the locked doors that we build around our hearts end up binding our pain and our fear and our doubts that much *closer* to us. Every hurt lays another stone, another row of bricks in the fortress walls that separate us from one another. Every

disappointment adds another strand of razor wire to the fence that binds us from even knowing the truth about our *selves*. Every shame slides to another lock that bars the door between us and the God who loves us.

“When it was evening on that first day” of the resurrection, John tells us, the *first day* of a new creation, when “the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked... for fear... Jesus came and stood among them.” Regardless of the walls they had built to close out the world and close in their pain, regardless of the fences they had strung to keep the world at bay and bind to themselves the worst of their fears, regardless of the doors they had slammed shut to hide themselves from the truth that was about to be revealed to the whole world and lock in their own doubts, with utter disregard for every obstacle, every obstruction, Jesus *found* them. In spite of the walls, in spite of the fences, in spite of the locked doors... in spite of *themselves*, the resurrected Son of God, the lover of their souls found them, and he breathed on them, and he said to them, “*Peace* be with you.”

And John says, “the disciples rejoiced.” That has *got* to be the biggest understatement in all of Scripture.

Here in the echo of last week’s glorious celebration of our Lord’s Resurrection, our Gospel lesson this morning calls us to remember that the love unknown that burst from the prison of death has broken *every* barrier down. The one who for his love for you and for me, gave up the glories of heaven to live as one of us, and to die as one of us, reaches for us again and again – even behind our high walled fences and our tight-barred doors. The Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the author of life and the giver of salvation, breathes his breath upon my heart and yours, he tears down the fences and *defenses* that bind us, he sets us free to love him and free to love one another, and he bids us *his* peace and *his* joy, for life everlasting and, perhaps even more importantly, right here and right *now*.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! [The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!]