

“Not Locked In, Not Locked Out”
A Sermon Delivered by Rev. John Balicki
Second Sunday of Easter
April 12, 2026
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, Wilton, Maine.

You would think they would have been wildly happy; you would think they had every reason to be afraid. What a paradox of emotions that first Easter evening. The happy part? Mary Magdalene had just seen the risen Jesus out in the garden and had told the other disciples of what she saw. But as we said last week, it takes a while for most to understand what the resurrection of Jesus really means and they had only a few hours to absorb this news.

The fearful part? Think of what it would have been like for them in the 48 hours from the crucifixion on Friday to Sunday afternoon. W. A. Criswell paints the picture so well:

.. The eleven apostles, like frightened sheep, crawl into eleven shadows to hide from the pointing finger of Jerusalem as it cries, “He is dead!” Wherever His disciples met, in an upper room, or on a lonely road, or behind closed doors, or in hiding places, the same refrain is sadly heard, “He is dead. He is in a tomb; they have sealed the grave and set a guard; He is dead.” It would be almost impossible for us to enter into the depths of despair that gripped their hearts.

Simon Peter, the rock, is a rock no longer.

And James and John, the sons of Boanerges, are sons of thunder no longer.

And Simon the Zealot is a zealot no longer.

He is dead, and the hope of the world has perished with Him.

Because Jesus had been executed on charges of sedition, his followers had reason to believe that their lives might be in danger because of their association with Jesus. Thus the frightened disciples are gathered behind locked doors.

Why do we lock our doors? Because we are afraid. Perhaps the fear is real and named. Someone is looking for us; someone doesn’t like us; perhaps someone has even threatened us. Or perhaps it is a more general fear of the world “out there”. “It’s a dangerous place out there”. Katherine Pershey describes well what it is like to be locked into a prison of fear:

Fear is a physiological response to tomorrow. It is almost always about death. Fear causes us to live in a perpetual state of anxiety. Fear is exhausting and depressing. Generally, the calamities I

expect do not come to pass. So I replace them with new ones. Time and energy that could be used constructively, for prayer, dishwashing, learning to quilt, I sacrifice to cultivate apprehension

Of course, when someone or something is locked in, someone else has to be locked out. Alyce MacKenzie tells this story of her first sermon while she was on a summer internship as a seminary student. She had mentioned it to her parents who, unbeknownst to her, mentioned it to all the relatives who lived nearby so as she pulled up to the church:

I saw, with horror, another car pull up beside me. It was filled with my three North Carolina uncles (Uncle Jim, Uncle Bill, and Uncle Horace and their wives Aunt Lucy, Aunt Catherine, and Aunt Louise). As they waved cheerily at me, I got out of the car and locked my keys and sermon manuscript inside. Have you ever been locked out?

I still remember that helpless feeling of being locked out. Locked out is how we feel when a child is trapped in an addiction or job situation and you can't break through to make it all better, to make them want help. Locked out is how we feel when someone we care about is filled with guilt and self-loathing. We keep assuring them they are forgiven, but they just aren't buying the fact that this good news is for them.

Locked out is how we feel when we read poverty statistics and wonder how things will ever change if we continue with politics as usual. Locked out is how those being discriminated against feel when they look at the worlds that are open to those who aren't. Have you or anyone you know ever been locked out?

You know who wasn't locked out? The risen Jesus. Locked door? Four walls? Didn't seem to make a difference. Now we can get all sidetracked about wondering: did he really do that? How could he do that? But we would be missing the bigger picture. he has come into our locked rooms, not just to visit, but bearing three gifts that can heal a hurting, hostile world.

What are those gifts? They are peace, purpose and power. You know in the days before lots of things were happening in threes. Jesus endured three temptations in the desert; Jesus prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane that "this cup would pass from him"; Peter denies Jesus three times. So today Jesus offers the blessing/greeting of "Peace", Shalom, three times. But it is not an easy peace, a passive contentment. It is a peace at the center of our being which gives the faith and confidence for the next two gifts.

Namely “purpose”, they are called to go out into the world bringing it forgiveness and reconciliation. And how are they going to do that? With the gift of power, the gift of the Holy Spirit – more on that one on Pentecost.

When does Jesus come with this peace, purpose and power? When people are locked in grief – like Mary; locked in fear – like the disciples; and locked in darkness – like the world.

I would add one final Easter gift in addition to the three p’s: And that’s the gift of curiosity. No it didn’t kill the cat, it’s a gift. If the disciples didn’t have some curiosity when the risen Jesus appeared through the locked doors, they would have run out of the room screaming and tried to hide. If Thomas didn’t have some curiosity, he would never have touched the wounds of the risen Christ.

Roger Housden says this about curiosity:

Curiosity causes us to wonder. Wonder causes us to gape. We can no longer keep such a tight hold on life when, just as in yawning, our mouth is wide open. The more I have come to realize how little I know of this life, the more curious I have grown. If we are curious, we at least know that our heart is still beating. Curiosity opens doors and connects us to the larger life of the world. It is a key as much to this moment as to some grand project that can last a lifetime.

We are called today to cultivate the gift of curiosity, to leave the rooms we've locked ourselves in and go out – emboldened by the knowledge that we bear the peace, purpose, and power of one who bears the scars of his own pain, and can pass through any walls that lock us in or out.