“LOCKED IN OR LOCKED OUT?”

I’M ALWAYS BEEN AMAZED AT THE WAY A PARTICULAR THEME THAT WE MAY BE CENTERING ON FOR A PERIOD OF TIME IN THE CHURCH KEEPS POPPING UP AGAIN & AGAIN.

I THINK WE’VE SEEN THAT WITH TWO DIFFERENT ONES OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS.

THE CALMING, YET CHALLENGING, WORDS OF JESUS “DO NOT BE AFRAID” IS A GOOD EXAMPLE.

WE USED IT AS OUR STEWARDSHIP THEME THIS PAST YEAR & IT SEEMS AS THOUGH ITS TIMELINESS & IMPORTANCE KEEPS COMING UP AGAIN & AGAIN.

THERE’S ANOTHER RECENT THEME, THOUGH, THAT HAS PARTICULAR RELEVANCE TO THIS PASSAGE WE’VE JUST READ FROM JOHN’S GOSPEL.
IT WAS THE THEME WITH WHICH WE BEGAN OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM LAST FALL - A FOCUS ON “DOORS” – THE DOORS THAT GOD OPENS IN OUR LIVES & THE WAY WE SO OFTEN HAVE DIFFICULTY WALKING THROUGH THOSE DOORS.

IRONICALLY, ONE OF THE REASONS FOR OUR RELUCTANCE RELATES TO THAT OTHER THEME WE JUST MENTIONED.

OUR FEARS KEEP US FROM WALKING THROUGH THE DIVINELY-PLACED DOORS OF LIFE.

THAT’S REALLY WHAT THIS PASSAGE IS ABOUT, ISN’T IT?

IT’S ABOUT THE DISCIPLES BEING LOCKED INSIDE THE UPPER ROOM – LOCKED INSIDE THEIR FEARS, THEIR DOUBTS, THEIR RELUCTANCE TO STEP OUT IN
FAITH & BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS OF THE RESURRECTION.

IN AN EFFORT TO LOCK THEIR ENEMIES OUT, THEY HAD LOCKED THEMSELVES IN.

BUT EVEN THEIR LOCKED DOORS & THEIR LOCKED HEARTS COULDN’T PREVENT JESUS FROM STEPPING INTO THAT ROOM & STEPPING BACK INTO THEIR LIVES.

LAST SUNDAY WAS A GLORIOUS DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH.

WE HAD A PACKED SANCTUARY, THE CHANCEL FILLED WITH LILIES, VOICES SINGING LOUDLY & BOISTEROUSLY OF THE TRIUMPH OF RESURRECTION.

AND NOW – HERE WE ARE – A WEEK LATER.

THIS SUNDAY HAS A DIFFERENT FEEL TO IT, DOESN’T IT?
IT’S LIKE SOMETHING BIG HAPPENED & NOW IT’S OVER & WE HAVE TO GET BACK TO OUR REGULAR ROUTINE OF DAY-TO-DAY LIVING.

THAT’S WHERE THE DISCIPLES FOUND THEMSELVES AT THE BEGINNING OF THESE WORDS WE’VE READ THIS MORNING.

THEY WERE HUDDLED TOGETHER IN FEAR FOR THEIR LIVES.

SUDDENLY, JESUS STANDS IN THEIR MIDST & SAYS, “PEACE BE WITH YOU.”

IT BEGS THE QUESTION – WHICH WOULD BE MORE FRIGHTENING – TO THINK YOU MIGHT BE ACCOSTED BY ENEMIES OF YOUR LEADER WHO WANT TO EXECUTE YOU THE SAME WAY THEY DID HIM – OR TO FIND THAT DEAD LEADER MIRACULOUSLY &
INEXPLICABLY STANDING IN FRONT OF YOU IN A LOCKED ROOM?!

I CAN’T HELP BUT THINK THE APPEARANCE OF JESUS IN THAT ROOM WAS MORE FRIGHTENING FOR THE DISCIPLES THAN A VISIT FROM ROMAN SOLDIERS WOULD HAVE BEEN!

HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THIS?

HE WAS DEAD.

THEY KNEW HE WAS DEAD.

OH, SURE, THEY’D BEEN TOLD THAT HE WAS ALIVE, BUT THEY KNEW BETTER.

THEY KNEW THAT DEAD PEOPLE DON’T COME BACK TO LIFE.

THEIR MINDS WOULD SURELY HAVE BEEN FILLED WITH A THOUSAND QUESTIONS.

“IS IT REALLY HIM?”
“IS HE REALLY ALIVE OR ARE WE SEEING A GHOST?”

“How did he get in here with the doors locked & bolted?”

These would have been logical questions that filled their minds.

But I can’t help but wonder if there weren’t other questions they had – questions that frightened them even more.

“What will he say to me? What will he think of me?”

Because, you see, it wasn’t just Peter who had to be frightened about that.

All of them had deserted him.
ALL OF THEM HAD REFUSED TO BELIEVE OR UNDERSTAND HIM WHEN HE TOLD THEM OVER & OVER AGAIN WHAT HIS FATE WOULD BE.

ALL OF THEM HAD BEEN TOO HARD-HEADED & HARD-HEARTED TO BELIEVE HIM WHEN HE TOLD THEM HE WOULD RISE AGAIN.

“NOW THAT IT’S COME TRUE, WHAT WILL HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD ME BE?”

HE DISPELS THEIR FEARS WITH WORDS THAT HE REPEATS THREE TIMES IN THESE VERSES – “PEACE BE WITH YOU."

HE’S THERE – NOT TO CHASTISE THEM – NOT TO SAY “I TOLD YOU SO” – NOT TO RIDICULE OR REBUKE THEM – BUT TO ENCOURAGE THEM & CHALLENGE THEM & GIVE THEM A MISSION IN LIFE!
THIS – WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT – IS JOHN’S PENTECOST STORY.

HE SENDS THEM OUT ON A MISSION & THEN THE PASSAGE SAYS, “HE BREATHED ON THEM & SAID TO THEM, ‘RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT...’”

THIS IS THE PENTECOST EVENT RIGHT HERE IN A LOCKED ROOM ON THE DAY OF THE RESURRECTION!

AND YOU SEE, I THINK THERE MAY BE ANOTHER REASON THAT THE REALITY OF CHRIST’S PRESENCE IN THEIR MIDST FRIGHTENED THE DISCIPLES.

IT MEANT THEY COULDN’T GO BACK TO LIFE AS IT HAD ALWAYS BEEN BEFORE.

THERE HAD TO BE AT LEAST A PASSING THOUGHT WITHIN EACH ONE OF THEM THAT NOW LIFE COULD GET BACK TO NORMAL.
NOW THEY COULD GO BACK TO THEIR “B.C.” –

BEFORE CHRIST - LIFE.

THEY COULD GO BACK TO THEIR FISHING BOATS
& THEIR TAX BOOTHs & GET ON WITH THE LIFE
THEY’D KNOWN BEFORE THEY’D EVER MET HIM.

HE WAS GONE NOW & THE WHOLE VENTURE WAS
OVER.

IT IS, INDEED, FRIGHTENING TO THINK OF CHRIST
STANDING IN OUR MIDST & SAYING, “I’VE GOT A
MISSION FOR YOU TO ACCOMPLISH.”

HE DOESN’T ALLOW US TO GO BACK TO THINGS
AS THEY USED TO BE.

BUT HE ALSO TELLS US WE’RE NOT GOING TO
HAVE TO DO IT ALONE.
HE BREAKS THROUGH THE LOCKED DOORS OF OUR LIVES, DISPELS OUR FEARS & BRINGS US THE PEACE THAT ONLY HE CAN BRING.

HE DOESN’T RIDICULE US OR REBUKE US FOR ANYTHING WE’VE DONE IN THE PAST.


HE CHALLENGES US WITH A BRAND-NEW FUTURE THAT STANDS BEFORE US.

THAT’S WHAT WE FIND IN THAT LOCKED ROOM ON THE NIGHT OF THE RESURRECTION.
BUT THAT ONLY TAKES US THROUGH HALF OF THIS PASSAGE, DOESN’T IT?

“A WEEK LATER,” JOHN SAYS, THE SAME ENCOUNTER TAKES PLACE.

BUT THIS TIME, OF COURSE, IT’S DIFFERENT.

IT’S DIFFERENT BECAUSE SOMEONE IS PRESENT THE NEXT TIME WHO WASN’T THERE THE PREVIOUS WEEK.

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT TO ALL 13 MEN OF OUR CONGREGATION WHO PORTRAYED JESUS & THE DISCIPLES ON MAUNDY THURSDAY, I HAVE TO TELL YOU – COREY FRITZ WAS MY FAVORITE – PRIMARILY BECAUSE HE WAS THE ONE PORTRAYING MY FAVORITE DISCIPLE.

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHAT THOMAS WAS DOING THAT FIRST NIGHT?
WHY WAS HE THE ONLY ONE WHO MISSED OUT?

TO ME, THOMAS IS ONE OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN JOHN’S GOSPEL.

HE SHOWS UP ONLY THREE TIMES, AND YET ALL THREE TIMES ARE CRUCIAL TO THE GOSPEL.

WHEN JESUS DECIDES HE’S GOING TO BETHANY BECAUSE HIS FRIEND LAZARUS HAS DIED, ALL THE OTHER DISCIPLES WARN HIM NOT TO DO IT.

THEY’RE ALL AFRAID TO GO BECAUSE OF THE PLOT TO ARREST JESUS.

ONLY THOMAS STEPS FORWARD & BOLDLY SAYS, “LET US ALSO GO, THAT WE MAY DIE WITH HIM.”

AND IN THE UPPER ROOM, WHEN JESUS MAKES THAT CRYPTIC DECLARATION, “YOU KNOW THE WAY THAT I AM GOING,” ONLY THOMAS SPEAKS UP TO QUESTION HIM.
ALL THE OTHERS – AFRAID OF LOOKING FOOLISH
– APPARENTLY JUST NOD THEIR HEADS AS IF TO SAY,
“OH, YEAH – WE KNOW THE WAY WHERE YOU’RE
GOING.”

ONLY THOMAS IS BOLD ENOUGH TO SAY, “WAIT A
MINUTE HERE, JESUS! HOW CAN WE KNOW THE WAY?”

IT IS IN RESPONSE TO HIS QUESTION THAT JESUS
GIVES ONE OF THE GREAT STATEMENTS OF THE
BIBLE – ONE OF OUR CHILDREN’S MEMORY WORK
VERSES – “I AM THE WAY & THE TRUTH & THE LIFE. NO
ONE COMES TO THE FATHER, BUT THROUGH ME.”

WITHOUT THE BOLDNESS & HONESTY OF
THOMAS, WE WOULDN’T HAVE THOSE WONDERFUL
WORDS OF CHRIST.

AND NOW, THOMAS TAKES CENTER STAGE ONCE
AGAIN IN JOHN’S GOSPEL.
HE WASN’T THERE THAT FIRST NIGHT & HE EXPRESSES LOGICAL & NATURAL SKEPTICISM.

THE QUESTION REMAINS, THOUGH – WHY WASN’T HE THERE?

THE OTHER DISCIPLES LOCKED THEMSELVES UP BECAUSE THEY WERE AFRAID.

DOES THIS IMPLY THAT THOMAS WASN’T?

WAS THOMAS, PERHAPS, THE ONLY ONE OUT THERE LOOKING FOR ANSWERS – RISKING HIS LIFE TO DISCOVER THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS?

OR WAS IT PERHAPS SOMETHING A BIT MORE PEDESTRIAN?

HAD THOMAS KNOWN THEY’D BE HOLED UP IN FEAR FOR A LONG TIME & GONE OUT FOR BREAD, MILK & CHEESE WHEN JESUS SHOWED UP?

“NAW, YOU’RE KIDDIN’ ME?! AND I MISSED HIM?!”
WE JUST DON’T KNOW WHY THOMAS WASN’T THERE THAT FIRST NIGHT.

BUT A WEEK LATER, HE WAS THERE & HERE’S WHERE JOHN’S GOSPEL ENDS.

LAST WEEK, WE TALKED ABOUT MARK’S STRANGE ENDING.


SO, IN ESSENCE, THE WORDS WE’VE READ THIS MORNING ARE HOW JOHN ENDED HIS GOSPEL.

AND IT’S THOMAS WHO ENDS IT.

JOHN BEGAN HIS GOSPEL WITH ANOTHER ONE OF OUR CHILDREN’S MEMORY VERSES - “IN THE
BEGINNING WAS THE WORD & THE WORD WAS WITH GOD & THE WORD WAS GOD.”

FROM THOSE UNFORGETTABLE OPENING WORDS, JOHN TAKES US THROUGH THE STORY – INTRODUCING US TO ALL SORTS OF CHARACTERS & SITUATIONS.

AND NOW, IN CHAPTER 20, HE COMES BACK TO THE VERY BEGINNING.

HE TOLD US, IN THOSE OPENING VERSES, THAT JESUS WAS GOD.

BUT WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

AND OFF HE GOES – THROUGH GALILEE & SAMARIA & INTO JERUSALEM – MOMENTS OF GLORY & MOMENTS OF AGONY UNTIL THEY ALL COME TOGETHER AT THE CROSS.

AND NOW, A WEEK LATER –
IT IS THOMAS –

THOMAS WHO DARED TO GO TO JERUSALEM TO DIE WITH HIM –

THOMAS WHO ASKS THE QUESTIONS OF JESUS WE’D ALL LIKE TO ASK –

IT’S THOMAS WHO IS THE FIRST ONE IN THE ENTIRE GOSPEL TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRUTH THAT JOHN HAS BEEN PROCLAIMING THROUGHOUT HIS ENTIRE GOSPEL WHEN HE SAYS TO JESUS – “MY LORD & MY GOD.”

“IN FACT,” HE SAYS, “I’LL BE WITH YOU ALWAYS – NOT JUST HERE BUT BEHIND ALL THE LOCKED DOORS OF THE ROOMS IN WHICH YOU CONFINE YOURSELF.”

HE SAYS, “I’LL BE THERE – Wherever you are - to bring you peace. I’ll be there to dispel your fears. I’ll be there to answer your doubts.”

DON’T TRY TO LOCK JESUS OUT & DON’T ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE LOCKED IN.

OPEN THE DOOR OF YOUR HEART SO THAT WHEN JESUS STANDS IN YOUR MIDST, YOU’RE READY TO JOIN THOMAS IN OFFERING THAT GREATEST OF ALL DECLARATIONS OF FAITH - “MY LORD & MY GOD!”

AMEN.

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