

## Locked Fast and Held Fast

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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April 6-7, 2024

### Year B: Easter 2 John 20:19-31

<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed, Alleluia!

But they didn't understand. Those precious disciples of Jesus, are hiding in a locked room, much like Adam and Eve hiding behind their clothing of leaves. They have knowledge but no understanding. There is an empty tomb, but it means nothing. As of yet, they don't know what resurrection means. Locked fast in a room full of fear. Of course they were afraid. They had good reason to be, for these were the ones who were in the garden and at the cross with Jesus. They saw what the Romans did to their Lord. But they don't know the locks on the doors to their house, were child's play for God who had just burst the gates of hell and death.

You and me, we don't see anyone or anything locked fast, do we? We don't see social media posts with language that no person would dare to utter face-to-face. We don't see ethnic groups locked in cemented opinions of one another. We don't hear politicians locked in arguments that have no solutions because they created

them to have no solutions. No, there aren't any locked fast rooms in our society. Right?

Let's make it more personal. Where do you and I get locked up? We want new life! We want it terribly in the places and spaces of our lives that feel the most dead. But we can get locked up fast when we try to change the family system, or try new behaviors, have a hard time forgiving, or simply because our bodies don't work the way they used to.

My Dad, lived with Parkinson's disease. I don't think he would mind me telling this story. The more advanced the disease got, the less his body moved freely. One day, Dad and I were coming out of King Soopers. He was using his walker and the walker got farther and farther away from his legs. He froze and couldn't move. So I grab him around the waist. "Hold up there, Dad, you're scaring me." To which he replied, "You're not half as scared as I am!" We get locked up too. In all sorts of ways.

Jesus came into the room. Suddenly the Risen Lord is standing in the disciples midst. After offering them peace, He commissions them to carry on the ministry. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He breathes the Holy Spirit into them with one more instruction. "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

What?! What does that mean? What is Jesus asking them to do? Or not do?

We hear this verse and often equate it to Matthew 16:19 where Jesus says to Peter (the Rock of the Church), "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." This is called the "Office of the Keys" given to clergy who have authority to pronounce – in Jesus' name - forgiveness to a person who is repentant and not forgive a person of a certain sin, if they are not repentant.

I've only known one clergyman who felt it his pastoral duty to bind a sin, of which the person had multiple chances to repent.

In John's Gospel something different is taking place. Verse 23 reads, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 'What's fascinating about this is that the word "sins" is missing from the second half of that verse and the verb (retain) can be translated "hold fast" or "embrace" instead of simply "retain." If you read it this way, you have, "If you

forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them, and anyone whom you hold fast (or embrace) is held fast.”<sup>i</sup>

Isn't that what the disciples do for Thomas? When Thomas asks for more data...when he simply asks for what they have already received – a sighting of the risen Lord, the text doesn't say they kicked him out. 'Sorry, Thomas, you cannot be a disciple now because you didn't believe our testimony.'

No. They don't shun him, critique him, or bad mouth him. Instead, they hold Thomas, until the time at which Jesus came and met him face to face. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them, and anyone whom you hold fast (or embrace) is held fast.”<sup>ii</sup>

And, isn't this what Jesus does for Thomas also? Here, see my hands and side. I'll give you what you need. No criticism.

Has anyone ever held you when you didn't know what to believe? When you were struggling to form an opinion or make a really tough decision? Who has held you, even embraced you and reminded you 'God will still love you, until this passes. Or until you can forgive.'

It **doesn't make sense** that Jesus who had taught the disciples to forgive...seventy times seven...would perpetuate sin in the world, by now allowing them to refrain from forgiving sin. It **does make sense** that Jesus would want the disciples to hold onto, to embrace, to stand next to a person who was struggling.

This isn't March Madness or an April fools joke. I told you the sermon title was 'Locked Fast and Held Fast.'

All of us, have been locked up fast in some fear, or trouble, or sin. And I truly hope that all of us have had the experience of being held fast...as we moved through whatever it was that seemingly wouldn't let go of us. Who is it you need to forgive? What has got you locked up that needs some Jesus resurrection?

God will give us the power to forgive. God gives us endurance to embrace. God will stand with us, holding us for as long as it takes. That is resurrection! Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> David Lose. In the Meantime. <https://www.davidlose.net/2018/04/easter-2-b-holding-fast/>

<sup>ii</sup> David Lose. In the Meantime. <https://www.davidlose.net/2018/04/easter-2-b-holding-fast/>