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“All Locked Up With No Place To Go?”
Text: John 20:19-31 (Acts 5:29-42; 1 Peter 1:3-9)

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed Alleluia!] **Alleluia!**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

How ya' doing?

We ask that all the time. It's a good conversation starter. And it's not a bad question. The problem, I think, is with our answers.

*Oh, I'm fine. You? I'm fine.
I'm good! You? I'm good, too.*

Maybe sometimes that's true. But most of the time it's not, is it? So why don't we answer honestly? Perhaps we don't want to burden others with our problems. Don't want to be a gloomy gus all the time.

More than that, though, I think, is that we don't want others to know our problems. For what would you think of me if you really knew me? If you knew the problems I have, and the sins I am struggling with, and my failures? That I'm really a mess, that my family isn't perfect, that I don't have it all together? That what you see on Sunday morning isn't really who I am? If you knew that all I really want to do is be like those disciples and go into my room and lock the door and try to keep the trouble out? Or forget about it for a while. Or wait until maybe it'll blow over. Because I'm afraid. I know me too well.

Ever think those things?
How ya' doing?

Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael, Matthew, James, Jude, and Simon weren't doing so well either. They were a mess. Each of them and all of them. The images of what had just happened were fresh in their minds. And when they weren't thinking of that the *shouldas*, *wouldas*, and *couldas* were probably taking up the rest of the time. Peter remembering his denials. The others remembering their cowardice. Maybe James and John remembering how they wanted the seats of honor next to Jesus in His kingdom. Yeah. Look at them now. *Peter - did you double check the lock on that door? Nathanael - peek outside; anyone there?* And the only thing worse than today? The thought of tomorrow.

Then Jesus shows up. And if you think our paraments are white, I'll bet at that moment the faces of those ten were whiter! Fear, embarrassment, wonder - *how?*, questions, doubts, awe, shame, terror . . . ***Peace be with you.***

And there are the holes . . . in the hands, the feet, the side. It's Jesus. No doubt about that. ***Peace be with you.*** He says it again, for they needed to hear it again. He holds nothing against them. He knows. And He forgives. Everything. All the guilt, all the shame, all that's gone wrong.

This is Jesus not only giving them what they need, it's Jesus teaching them about what they just saw. Because of His wounds, because of His death, there is now peace with God. They are reconciled. All they deserve He has taken. Yes that should have be them, but it's not. And what they don't deserve, He gives. ***Peace be with you.*** I forgive you.

Then, we are told - ***then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*** Not before. *Before* forgiveness there were only the doubts and fear and shame and all the mixed-up jumble of confusion and guilt. *After* forgiveness they were glad. They were absolved. Jesus is not mad at them, is not their enemy now, is holding nothing against them. It's . . . *it's almost as if nothing ever happened . . .*

Exactly.

It's what Jeremiah had written so long ago: *I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more* (Jer 31:34).

Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Overjoyed is more like it. They didn't have to hide anymore. They didn't have to run anymore. And they didn't. They leave that locked room to share their joy with Thomas. They leave that locked room to share their joy with the world. Did you hear the reading from Acts? No fear of the Jews there! Just boldness; defiance. ***We must obey God rather than men.*** . . . And ***they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.*** The name of the God who doesn't condemn but forgives! The name of the God who unlocked their prison of sin and shame and absolves and forgets. The name of the God who died for them. The name of Jesus.

So where are you hiding? Where are you running? What's locking the door of your heart?

Nothing! I'm fine, Pastor. Really! Everything's good. Good. Couldn't be better . . .

You know, that's why we don't start the service here every week with "How ya doing?" Jesus knows how you're doing. He's knows better than you! Because sometimes we work so hard trying to fool others that we even wind up fooling ourselves.

And so instead we start the service here every week just like that first Easter night. Jesus comes. He comes here. To you. Locked in your sin and shame, afraid to let anyone know what you're really like, how bad a sinner you are, that you don't have it all together. We just start with Jesus. His name. And His Absolution. *In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sin.* In His name. **Peace be with you.** Because He commanded those ten, and the Church, to forgive.

That's why we start the service this way. That's why I'm here so often for Private Absolution. No judgment. Just forgiveness. Freedom from your locked doors and shame. Because of His wounds. Why are you hanging on to what He took away? That's also why Baptism. That's why the Supper. Forgiveness for young and old. Forgiveness for you. Jesus said it twice in that room that night. They needed to hear it again. You need to hear it again. And again and again. And to receive this gift again and again. To come out of your locked doors. To live.

So your Pastor forgives. Try it sometime. Unlock your heart; dump your whole mess in my ears; spew it out. Why hang on to what Jesus takes away. *I forgive you all your sins . . .*

So come here for forgiveness, yes. Jesus loves it when you do. He is overjoyed. Your Pastor is too. For remember the last really great Christmas gift you bought or made for someone? The one you took so much time and thought it just perfect, just what they needed? How do you feel when that person opens it up and says: *Oh. Yeah. Thanks.* And quickly puts it aside? But how much joy for you, the giver, when it is received with joy! So too with Jesus and His forgiveness. He wants to give it. To you. It's His joy, and yours.

And speak those words too. Because when you don't, you're also hanging on to what Jesus takes away! Which Satan absolutely loves. That's why the six hardest words to speak are: *I am sorry*, and *I forgive you*. We so often would rather say and do *anything* but those words. You see how Satan has wormed his way into us?

So speak those words too. Don't give Satan the satisfaction. Don't lock yourself up again. Don't look at the sin committed against you. Don't look at the sin in you. Look at Jesus, His wounds. For you. And though you cannot put your fingers and hands into them, He puts his wounded but now raised Body and Blood into you. For the same joy. The same forgiveness. The same freedom. So you don't have to hide anymore. So you don't have to run anymore. So you can leave that locked up heart and locked up room and live in joy and peace.

And you know what? You may suffer for it, like the disciples. That's true. I'm not going to tell you that life will be all rosy. Not everyone out there will forgive. You'll even be

betrayed by fellow Christians. Because those Christians, you know, they're sinners too. And family members, friends. And it'll hurt. Maybe you'll do it too. . . . Well, not maybe, right?

And so we come back here and dump it again. And Jesus is here, *again!* Forgiving. Absolving. Never growing tired of it. Which is sometimes hard to believe, isn't it? There must be a limit, right? But you can't out-sin the cross. You can leave it and not want forgiveness. You can reject it and not think you need forgiveness. But you can't out-sin it. If it was just a man there, then yes. But that's not just a man there. That's Jesus. Your God. For you. To forgive you. And to provide you ***an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.***

That's coming. For now, the trials. Which we usually think of as great persecutions and troubles. But maybe it's much simpler than that. Maybe the greatest trials we will go through are those six words. Humbling ourselves to say *I am sorry*. And loving to say *I forgive you*. Maybe that's hard enough.

And that's *the pure spiritual milk* we need. To *grow up to salvation*. For what is salvation but our freedom and rescue from sin and death? That *peace be with you*. That you depart in peace. Reconciled. Redeemed. A child of God. Dearly loved. Forgiven and free. The death and resurrection **and joy** of Jesus *yours*. Now and forever, **peace be with you**.

For **Christ is risen!** [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] **Alleluia!**

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.