

The Rev. T. Stewart Lucas
St. Margaret's Church
Second Sunday of Easter
April 11, 2010

Every night when I was growing up, right after the 11 o'clock news was over, my dad would check all the locks, close the garage doors and turn on the burglar alarm. Beep, beep, beep, beep beeeeeeeep. We had built our new house in the 1987, and burglar alarms were THE thing to have. No longer were they simply a little special key you turned on the outside of your house with a little red light on it. Technology brought little sensors for windows and motion detectors, and now they were even hooked up to the fire and police department. It was important to protect our investment and all of our stuff.

But of course those security systems also made me feel safe and secure. I slept better knowing the alarm was set, and I still do today. Somehow I believe that I am out of harm's way. If I stay locked up all night, I will wake up and everything will be okay in the morning. Those locked doors armed by technology set aside the fears, anxieties and the unknown that put to sleep those middle of the night fears and wanderings of my roaming imagination.

I wonder if that's a little bit of what the disciples were feeling that Easter evening. They were completely overwhelmed and utterly exhausted. Their fears and anxieties were palpable. Their hearts were full of grief, and surely those who had killed Jesus were coming after them next. They had been together for so long, but at the moment it mattered the most, they fell asleep, deserted him and some even denied him.

Yes, they were scared for their lives, but they felt scorned, ridiculed and knew they had failed. Surely they were ashamed for their actions, or lack thereof.

So that makes me think that yes, they were hiding and locking out the enemies, but at the same time, and perhaps even more so, they were locking themselves in.

And so it goes with us as well and with our hearts.

Yes, this morning we continue to remember the Easter story and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yes, we now follow the story of the disciples and the early church foundations. But at the same time, perhaps John is giving us a metaphor for the fears we face as Christians in this day and age.

"We face fears, anxieties, trepidations, uncertainties, and even shame on a daily basis. We slam home the bolts of the locks on our hearts, and we realize that by locking the world out, we are really shutting ourselves in. We become a prisoner of our own sins, shame, and self-perceptions. Like the disciples, we try to hide from our shame and disappointment in ourselves by locking the doors to our hearts and not letting anyone in."ⁱ

And that, my friends, keeps us from being witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. That fear so often keeps us from proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ. Because we are baptized members of the Body of Christ, we are called to be witnesses. We cannot keep the story to ourselves. It must be shared, or the story dies. And this is not a story about death, but about new life.

“What could it mean to be called, as members of the Church, to take part in God’s speaking of the Gospel of Christ? To answer this, it is a great resource that Peter’s refusal to stop speaking out comes in the same chapter of Acts that gives us an extraordinarily vivid depiction of what Gerhard Lohfink calls the *vita apostolica*, the living-and-being together of the disciples. As Lohfink notes, the newness of this community represented in the way they newly become completely dependent on and responsible for one another is an integral part of Easter’s reality.”ⁱⁱ The new community is completely dependent on one another and on the Holy Spirit.

Our identity as Americans tempts us to keep our stories private. Our individualistic society tempts us to lock our hearts and make masks to cover up our true story and identity as Christians. And yet as Americans, we also have the great freedom to speak out and to tell others about our faith in word and example.

Our identity as Episcopalians tempts us to keep our stories private. Our ancient tradition and prestige and image of ourselves tempt us to lock our hearts and hide behind the masks of tradition and history to cover up our true story and identity first as Christians. That is inviting and dangerous and yet it is one of the reasons I am part of this church.

I love our tradition and our reason and our liturgy because it gives me comfort, strength and solace. But the Easter story trumps all patriotism and denomination. The Easter story makes us part of a new community of believers, of witnesses to the Resurrection. And now we have a new identity. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead frees us from all assaults of the enemy and all outward and visible signs that may assault and hurt the soul and our hearts.

We are set free to tell the story and make new disciples and witnesses. We brought four new sheep into the fold through baptism at the Easter Vigil, and at the 11:15am service we will welcome two new children into the household of God. We will vow to tell them the story, and we must.

It is a daunting task, and we will want to hold up in our homes and lock the doors from time to time. But Jesus breaks in and says “Peace be with you.” Set your doubts and anxieties aside. He has restored and redeemed us and will give us the Holy Spirit to do the work of ministry and the ministry of reconciliation.

“To forgive,” in Greek, also means “to set free.” It means to release from bondage and captivity. When Jesus stands among the disciples in a room with a locked door and announces, “Peace be with you,” he is saying not only are “You are forgiven,” but also “You are free.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus comes looking for us, wherever we are, wandering or locked away. And Jesus always finds us and comes into our hearts and sets us free. Now it is our job and ministry to help others unlock their hearts. Now it is our calling to help them know the freedom and the joy of forgiveness and reconciliation. Christ has died, Christ has come, and Christ will come again. Our “fear is changed to faith, anxiety to peace, shame to restoration, and the locks on our hearts have all been” broken, and we are set free. Alleluia. Amen.

ⁱ -- The Rev. Scott Baker is rector of St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Newport News, Virginia.
http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons_that_work_121210_ENG_HTM.htm

ⁱⁱ <http://ekklesiaproject.blogspot.com/2010/04/speaking-out.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.* Baker.