Behind Locked Doors:
April 23, 2017

In our neighborhood… [1 Smash and Grab]
Not on our block…
Or right next door…

But in our general area…
There have been some cars…
Parked… outside overnight…

That criminals…
Have broken into.

They have smashed the windows…
And stolen the contents of the vehicle.

We have one of those…
Online neighborhood sites…
Community electronic bulletin board.

Where people ask for recommendations…
For home repairs…
Medical treatment…
All kinds of things.

They also post their junk online.
Like old foosball tables…
That they are trying to get rid of.

But mostly… what I have found…
It's where people complain…
About other neighbors…
Not picking up…
Their dog dropping…

Kids driving cars too fast.
Or one of the other…
Million little irritants…

That become the topic du jour…
And causes “normal” neighbors…
To become vicious word-smiths…
Attacking anyone with an opinion…
Different than their own.

Anyway… when the cars were broken into…
THIS became a source of panic…
There was an urgent call for action…
Posted by one of the very concerned neighbors.

This person provided a checklist of things to do…
In reaction to the recent petty larceny…

They suggested that we all…
Leave our lights on all night long…
In the front and the back of our houses.

And encouraged us to remember…
Your lights aren't just about you…
Leave them on for the safety… and security…
Of the whole neighborhood.

Also… this concerned neighbor suggested…
That we get home security systems…
To make sure…
We know…
When someone breaks into our homes…

They even suggested… buying a dog…
That will bark and scare away the bad guys.
Or the bad gals…
Whatever the case may be.

I had a different idea…
I thought… park your car inside your garage.
Don't leave it outside.
And close the garage door… at night.

I don’t know.
Seemed like an obvious solution.
Whatever.

Now…
I’m not saying it won’t happen to us.
It might.
Someone MIGHT…
Break into our garage…
Smash the windows of our cars…
Steal the plastic ice scraper…
We keep hidden underneath our seats.

Because there is nothing else of value…
Inside our vehicles.
Nothing worth stealing…
Except the car itself.
However… This is what I want to tell you today. 
I am not going to live in fear…
I am not going to cower at the prospect…
That someone MIGHT break into my car.

I am not going to stay awake at night…
Thinking that there is some nefarious activity…
Happening right outside our door.

If something DOES happen…
We will DEAL with it.

But I will not “borrow trouble”…
As my grandmother used to say.

So let’s put our gospel lesson into context. [2 Mary at Empty Tomb]
Our story takes place…
On the same day…
That the disciples found out…
That their dead friend and teacher… Jesus…
Was not where they left him.

It went like this…
Early in the morning…
Mary Magdalene went to the tomb…
And found everything disrupted.
Not very grave-like and respectful…

The tomb was open.
The stone was moved.
It looked bad.
Like someone had vandalized…
The grave of Jesus.
And stole his body.

So she ran to get Peter and John…
She said to them… word for word.
They have taken the Lord…
Out of the tomb…
And we don’t know…
Where they have put him.

So Peter and John… [3 Peter and John]
They ran to the tomb…
Just as fast as they possibly could…
To see for themselves.

They bent over and looked in…
And all they could see…
Were few discarded pieces of cloth... [4 Grave Clothes]
Lying where Jesus’ body...
Was supposed to be.

They went inside.
Saw the grave clothes strewn about...
And it says... they believed...

Not that Jesus had been raised....
From the dead...

The scripture... specifically states...
They still did not understand...
That Jesus had to rise from the dead.

In other words...
They didn’t get it.
They didn't understand.

And in John’s account of the resurrection...
There is no angel to tell them...
What has happened.

What they believed...
Was what Mary Magdalene...
Had just told them.
Jesus was gone.
His body was missing.

Everything was wrong.
First Jesus was dead.
Now he was missing.

So... they went back...
To where they were staying.

In the meantime...
Mary has an encounter...
With the risen Jesus...

She reported to the disciples...
That she had seen Jesus...
And he said some really great things...

But still... THEY had not seen him...
THEY had no experience with him.
THEY had nothing to believe...
Other than... the word of Mary.
It wasn’t enough.
No sir.
It didn't feel right.
This whole situation was messed up…
Beyond repair.

They wanted no part of it.
So they locked themselves away. [5 Locked Door]
Because they were… AFRAID.

So listen…
Locks make us feel safe… right?
We lock our doors…
To our house…
To keep other people out.

We lock our cars at night…
To keep other people out…

We lock our safety deposit boxes…
Our safes…
Our diaries…
TO KEEP OTHER PEOPLE OUT.

The disciples did the same thing.
They think they’re safe.
They think they’ll be alright…
Safe and sound…
Behind the locked doors.

The others are outside…
You know… the bad people…
They are outside…
We are inside.
Everything is hunky-dory.

They think to themselves…
When this all this blows over…
When it's safe outside again…

And people forget…
All about Jesus…
We’ll sneak out of town
And go back to our old lives.

But the tragedy… of this story…
The real sinister thing going on…
Is that the disciples have…
Locked themselves in.
Their fear and their anxiety... 
Have completely taken over... their lives.

The disciples thought they were 
keeping the others out.

But in reality... 
Those locks on the doors 
Were keeping those scared... 
Anxious ridden disciples in.

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Then... Jesus shows up. [6 Jesus Breathed] 
Just as the risen Lord bursts the gates of death... 
The risen Lord bursts through the locked doors...

He comes in and tells them... 
To do the very thing... 
They fear so much.

Jesus commands them, 
“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” 
In Greek, the word for someone who is sent... 
is “apostle.”

Jesus is turning his followers... 
His disciples... 
Into his apostles.

He is changing their primary purpose.

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When they were disciples... 
It was their job... 
To learn from the teacher.

Now... he is empowering them... 
With the Holy Spirit... 
He is sending them... 
Out to carry on the work he began.

Jesus breaking the locks off the doors... 
And kicking them out into... 
A very scary world.

Jesus is sending them out... 
To proclaim the love of God... 
And the good news of Jesus... 
To the exact same people they fear.

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[Will Smith Video]
The place where fear... thrives... [7 Fear is a Liar]
Is in our thoughts of the future.

It is a product of our imagination...
Causing us to be afraid of things...
That don't currently exist...
And MIGHT NOT ever exist.

Now... danger is real.
There are things to be afraid of.
You might be afraid of violence.
You might be afraid of losing someone you love.
You might be afraid of walking through a dark alley.

All those things are legit fears.
It's not that we shouldn't be afraid...
Of some things in this world...

It's more that...
We shouldn't let our present fear...
Stop us from doing what we need to do...
In order to live the life Christ...
Intends for us to live.

So the disciples logic was...

YOU CAN'T GET HURT...
IF YOU KEEP EVERYBODY OUT.
And that is basically true...

But on the other hand...
Followers of Christ...
YOU CAN'T DO...
WHAT JESUS HAS CALLED YOU TO DO...
IF YOU KEEP YOURSELF LOCKED AWAY.
ALL THE TIME...

You will be safe...
But you will be ineffective.

Because this life...
And this love...
And this ministry...
That we have been given...
Call us to INTERACT...
With other people.

It's just the way it works.
I had a childhood friend...
His name was John.
And his family was so cool...
Because they were nothing like my family.

His dad was in the military.
They had traveled all over the world.
His mother was German...
Not in heritage...
She was German.

Sometimes... that culture was way different.
At their house... we ate bologna and cheese bagels...
FOR BREAKFAST.

Now... I grew up in small town Iowa.
I hadn't even seen a bagel...
Let alone... eat bologna and cheese bagels...
For breakfast.

It was amazing.

Now...
I couldn't always understand Irmgard...
Her English was heavy laden with...
German intonations and sounds...

I remember...
She would get mad at John...
And yell things like...
Johnny... du bist ein sau-hund.
You're a pig dog.
Actually... I think it's a swear word...
Auf Deutsch...

Anyway... one time I invited her to church...
She sat down with me...
And explained that she believed in God...
She just didn't believe in organized religion...

She said...
She didn't need to be inside a building...
In order to worship God...
OR for that matter...
To be a Christian.

And I get that.
People say the same thing...
About worshipping God...
Out in the mountains...

They say...
I don’t have to come to church...
To do this God thing.

Which I really do...
Understand.

I feel close to God...
Out in the middle of God’s creation.
When you can see the work of God’s hands...
And the miracles of creation...
All around you.
It is powerful...

HOWEVER...
We are not called...
To be an island unto ourselves.

We are not sent by Christ...
To make sure that WE...
Have warm fuzzy feelings...
About God... or God’s creation...
For ourselves.

We have not been commissioned by Christ...
To live our lives...
In a vacuum...
Without any significant relationships.

And I would be so bold...
This day... to say...
That you can’t love...
The way Christ calls you to love...
By yourself.

It’s not possible.

Now... I’m not saying...
You need to be an EXTROVERT...
Hobnobbing... socializing...
Hand pumping... fake...
Follower of Christ.

But I am saying...
That Christ has called us to love.
You can’t love… all by yourself.
Love gets expressed within a context of relationship.

FEAR makes love more difficult to accomplish.  
Instead on focusing on what we are called to do…
We begin to internalize…
We turn back onto ourselves…
We worry…
About what MIGHT happen to us.

We cut ourselves off from other people.
We lock ourselves away.

Instead of focusing on the possibility…
Of what God CAN do…
Through us…
For other people.

1 John 4:18… one of my favorite verses…
There is no fear in love. \[8 \text{Love > Fear}\]

And see… the resurrection of Jesus…
Is supposed to free us from that fear…

We know that there are things…
That can hurt us…
In this world.

We know that we have been given…
This one life… from God…
And sometimes…
It’s a bit… fragile…

We know that one day we are going to die.
It’s going to happen.
This is not a surprise…

But the fear…
Associated with all those things…
Can cause you…
To sit upright in bed…
In the middle of the night…

And say to yourself…
What’s going to happen to me?
Am I going to be ok?
Is everything going to end…
Happy and good.
Or not?
And in those moments of greatest fear…
We need to remember… what we know.

We know that Jesus was raised from the dead.

And Jesus comes into the midst of our fears…
Breathes on us…
Gives us the Holy Spirit…

And in the middle of everything…
That threatens to destroy us…

In the middle of everything…
That causes us…
To be afraid…
And doubt that God…
Is going to take care of us…

And in the middle of everything…
That this old world…
Throws at us…

Jesus says… PEACE.

Understand what it means…
That we confess Jesus was dead…
And now he’s alive.

It means God has this under control.
It means even though you die… you will live.

It means even if something hurts you…
During the course of this life…
Your life is eternally safe with Christ.

Ultimately… It means.
God wins.

So.
Don’t lock yourself away.
Don’t cower behind locked doors.
Don’t believe the powers of this world…
Are stronger than…
The power of your God.

Because it’s not true.
Because brothers and sisters in Christ…
Jesus was dead.
But now…

HE IS RISEN!
HE IS RISEN INDEED!
ALLELUIA!

Thanks be to God.
Amen!