

Arise: Peace John 20:9, 20-21

Sandy Rothschiller

When I was in first grade I lived in Massachusetts. One of my favorite spring activities was going out with my friends to the pond down the street. There was so much to discover in the pond. My friends and I would look for frogs, tadpoles and snakes. We would collect them and put them in a bucket and take them back to my friend's garage to watch them and play with them. When we were done playing with them we would return them to the pond. The next day we would head to the pond and do the same thing! Such fun to play with the frogs and snakes and watch the tadpoles swim!

In second grade my family moved to Connecticut. And that is where I went from playing with snakes to having a real fear of them. One day my dad was chopping wood behind our house. He flipped over a log and was startled by a family of copperhead snakes. Copperhead snakes are poisonous. Within a week the copperhead snakes were found in my mom's flower garden and our back porch. I heard for the first time that snakes were dangerous. We weren't allowed to play with those snakes because they could hurt us. That was it. From that time on I have had a huge fear of snakes!

There is a rational fear of poisonous snakes that is healthy. It isn't safe to play with poisonous snakes. However, not all snakes are poisonous and most of them, especially in Minnesota, aren't poisonous or even dangerous. Yet, my fear of any snakes affects me to this day. When I see a snake, I scream and jump on the nearest person to me!

Fear... all of us have experienced some kind of fear in our lives. Some of our fears help keep us safe, and yet other fears that we have can hinder us and rob us of the joy and peace that life has to offer.

The disciples were experiencing fear in our reading today. They were hiding in a locked room after Jesus had been crucified. They were afraid of what would happen to them if they were discovered. Today's

reading is from the gospel of St. John the 20th chapter.

⁹ That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. ²⁰ As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! ²¹ Again he said, "Peace be with you."

Here is the situation that the disciples found themselves in. They were known followers of Jesus. They trusted Jesus that he would be the savior of the world. Then everything fell apart. Suddenly Jesus was seen as a criminal. The masses, the Jewish leaders, and all the townspeople turned against Jesus and had him crucified. So, not only did Jesus die, but because they followed him, now the disciples felt their lives were in danger. The disciples locked the doors because they were afraid. They were afraid if they were discovered, they could potentially die the same death of Jesus. As they hovered in fear, the last thing the disciples were expecting to see was Jesus. And when Jesus shared those amazing words, it melted the fear from their hearts. Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you!"

The fear of the disciples huddled together in a room almost 2000 years ago was real. They locked those doors hoping to keep everyone out! But there was one that they could not keep out. Jesus.

What do you do when you are afraid? Many of us lock our car doors and the doors of our homes every night. And that is a good thing....but fear can also cause us to lock another door. I am not talking about the door to our house or car. I am talking about the door to our heart. We often lock the door of our heart because we are afraid. We are afraid of being rejected, of being hurt or betrayed.

When we lock the door of our hearts, we miss out on peace. We can lock our heart's door out of fear of rejection. Rejection is painful. I remember not being invited to a friend's party because I was a pastor. That sense of rejection has stayed with me. There are times when I am afraid of sharing what I really think or what I really feel because then people may not like what I say and leave me out. I know I am not alone. Think of times when you have been rejected. When we hide behind our heart's locked door, it can keep us from meaningful relationships, and that is no way to live. After being rejected, it takes time to unlock our hearts

to be open again and find peace.

We can lock our heart's door out of fear of getting hurt. What if I step out there, and then get my heart broken? It hurts when our heart breaks, when we feel out of control. We often find our hearts locked, closed off to new things because we are afraid of feeling hurt again.

I am a dog person. I love dogs! I was so excited when we adopted a dog. Our girls were 4 and 6, it was a perfect time. The girls named our dog Toto. Toto was a Pekinese with an attitude...but we loved him. He was a significant part of our family. When Toto died, our girls were in college. It was devastating. It hurt so much. In fact, I hurt so much that I said that I would never get another dog. It was too painful to love a dog only to have him die. I locked my heart out of fear of feeling hurt. I just wanted to feel okay again, I just wanted to be at peace.

We can also lock our heart's door for fear of being betrayed. Remember who was hiding in our reading today? The disciples. They were afraid of their own people, their own families and friends. Sometimes betrayal from our own family or friends hurts the worst. Did I say, "sometimes"? No, betrayal by people we love hurts every time. Out of fear of being betrayed, we can lock our heart's door.

When we find ourselves locking our hearts out of fear, it can hold us back from living the life that God intends for us. Instead of living in peace, we live in fear. And Jesus knows this about us. He knows that the fears we experience rejection, hurt, betrayal can rob us of the peace and joy of life. Jesus knows these feelings because he experienced rejection, hurt and betrayal. In our reading today, he also knew the fear of the disciples in the locked room. What does Jesus do about it? He walks right through the locked door and says, "Peace be with you." "Peace be with YOU."

Jesus shares with his disciples the words that melt in the face of fear. "Peace." "Peace be with you." You don't have to be afraid. It's me. I am here, and I am with you all the time. I am with you now and forever to bring you peace. Jesus says those same words to you and me when we lock the doors of our hearts. Jesus says, "Peace, peace be with you." And he knows the fears of our locked hearts as well. And he knows what his peace bring us.

This peace that Jesus gives to his disciples that day, and that peace he gives to you and me is a life-giving peace. It is important to remember that the peace that

Jesus gives us does not bring an absence of conflict. It is not about a life that is free of struggles. In John 14, Jesus tells us, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." The peace that Jesus gives us allows us to unlock our hearts, knowing he is dwelling in us.

It is this sense of peace that came over me when my family decided to adopt another rescue dog. My heart was unlocked, it was open to take in another dog. Our family adopted Max two years after Toto died. Max has been such a blessing to not only our family, but to so many others who get to experience his love!

The peace Jesus brings is a deep heart knowledge that no matter what we go through, Jesus dwells within us. And that his peace knows no locked door. There is no door that can keep God out, not even a locked heart.

What are ways we can live into this peace? Let's try this today. Let's take a few moments right now and allow the word "Peace" to echo in your mind and heart. In the next few moments, repeat the words over and over again. "God's peace dwells in me."

Give time every day to receive this gift of peace. There is no locked door that will keep Jesus out, especially the door of your heart.