

that if his dad can break into that locked space, that God is able to break into that locked space and release him from the inside out. And he was telling this story to 2000 Christian leaders as encouragement to not be afraid to go venture into people's locked space. Jesus will release you to be with others in their locked space. Please don't take your anxiety with you. Work that out before hand. Are you open to accepting Jesus' presence in your narrow confined spaces? And then are you ready to share that peace with others in their confined space? Let us pray.

Gracious God, as you have ministered to your disciples and to us, when you meet us in places where we feel shut out and shut down, may you help us to be servants of Christ, to meet one another in our small spaces and fears. It is through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

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**Access to Locked Space**  
John 20:19-23

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Where are you in your life where you are feeling locked up and afraid? Where are you protecting yourself? Where are you hiding from something that could hurt you? The resurrect Jesus has the power to be with you in your locked space. You can't make Jesus come in, and you can't really keep Jesus out. You can ignore Jesus while he's in the space with you.

So what are you afraid of? We lock and alarm our homes today at an alarming rate so that people will not break in and take our stuff or hurt us. It makes sense.

Back in the mid 1980s we lived in Dallas, Texas and we had a fairly extensive alarm system in our home. On that alarm panel was a panic button that you only pushed if someone was into the house with you and it was a desperate situation. One afternoon my wife got a call from the alarm system and said, are you okay Mrs. Icenogle? She said I'm fine. She said it's okay Mrs. Icenogle you can talk. Tell us that it's, that there's, if there's anybody in the room just answer the question yes or no. She said really there's nobody here except my family. I understand Mrs. Icenogle we're sending out the police as fast as we can. In fact they should be right outside the house right now. And I looked out the window and we were surrounded by the police department with guns pulled.

Is there someone holding you hostage? Let us know. Don't worry, we'll be right

there. Well in the middle of our shock we tried to figure out what was going on. We let the police come in. And they looked around the house and decided that it was just us as the family. We were trying to understand how it is that they got the panic button, and then it dawned on us that our little daughter, four year old Tonya loved to push buttons. She would push our buttons sometimes, and she pushed the panic button because she just loved to push buttons. Well that had started the whole thing.

Where are you in your life where you're quietly pushing the panic button but you're really not allowing anybody else to be with you in the middle of that tough space? Jesus can get into your closed space in fact Jesus is already there if you would take time to recognize him.

Where and when do we often get locked up in our tough spaces? Sometimes we think we've got nothing to offer anybody else so we hide, thinking we don't have enough money and so we really don't want to go out and be with other people because they won't accept us for our state of poverty. Thinking we have no job we've lost our status, we should hide out because there is really nothing to talk about when we're with other people. We're feeling alone and alone; trying to face cancer on our own and frankly we just don't want to talk about it with anybody else, so we've locked ourselves into our emotional quiet place. We're feeling sorry for ourselves. We made be afraid of cancer and death and dying but we sure don't want to talk about it, it may just intensify the whole problem.

Sometimes on our journey of spiritual development we get stuck at stages or as one book called it, caged at stages. We can get locked into a pattern of life and re-

Cynthia Wauke McCullough and she entitled the book this way: My Husband Said He Needed More Space So I locked Him Outside. I don't think that's the right way to handle it actually. It might work for a little while. You may need to sit with him or her in their locked space. Or you may need to invite somebody else to come over and ask them why are they locking themselves up?

A man lost his father. He had been very close to him and his grief was deep and terrible. He felt like he was in a locked dark space most of the days of his grief. No one could get in there and get to him. He was completely shut off to other human beings. In his prayers he would often say God I hope you can be with me in this space because I feel terribly alone and lost without my dad. He heard the voice of God say I am here with you, but I want you to stay here with me in this locked space for a while. The man said are you kidding Lord? I'd like out please. And God said, no let's stay here in this locked space for a while. There are some things that might be helpful to talk about. And then in the middle of that conversation he remembered an event early in his childhood when he was four that he had locked himself in his bathroom upstairs in the house. He was just old enough to pull the lock and not old enough to undo the lock. He locked himself in and couldn't get out and crying for help and his daddy on the other side of the door saying I'll get to you, I'll get to you, just relax I'll find a way in. He waited and he heard someone outside the window. It was his father coming up the back of the house on a stepladder and he opened the window from the outside and crawled in and opened the door from the inside.

He remembered that event. And then at that moment he was able to realize

every Sunday morning in the passing of the peace. In the passing of the peace we are literally going to another human being and saying be unlocked in Jesus presence. You don't have to say tied up. A prisoner of your fear.

I was with an elder in a previous church who was dying of cancer. She had led many parts of the church's ministry but her husband called me because she had been up most of the night terribly afraid. High anxiety, just beside herself with fear and he said please come over and just be with us. I went over and I talked with them. But mostly I listened. I asked her just one question. I said, tell me what you're afraid of. And she talked for an hour. She just needed somebody to ask her the question.

If you are with a highly anxious person maybe you just ask them that one question. What are you afraid of? And after she had unloaded all that, she said oh I feel so much better now. It may be just a matter of getting a person to talk. And all I do is represent Jesus because Jesus is right there in the room. When you go and you release another person you represent Jesus, Jesus is right there in the room.

I can't say that she died in perfect peace, but I can say that she did not die alone, and she was able to talk about her anxiety when she had it. You don't have to stay locked up in your own fears.

There are some people who tell me their spouses have locked themselves up away from them. I hear this fairly regularly in this church. I won't name any names this morning. They ask me to please pray for them because their spouse is not talking to them. Not being present with them. They've hidden themselves away in their emotional blank and bank spot. I noticed a book recently about this the other day by

fuse to grow any further because of fear. And what drives us into hiding? Abuse? Wounds, hurts? Burn out?

I can't tell you how many Presbyterians over the years have literally abandoned the church because they worked so hard for a period of time they just couldn't handle it any more. They wanted to go into hiding because they had given so much of themselves they had nothing else to give.

I'm always concerned about people who work so hard and then burn out and disappear. They've gone into their locked space. Please if you're serving the church don't get to that place where you've overstretched your own boundaries, where you have to go into hiding.

In the midst of all that this text clearly says that Jesus comes into the space where the disciples were locked up. For fear that they too would be caught and tried and crucified. They had a reason to be afraid. Jesus literally appears to them within the room, suddenly and he does not berate them for hiding out or for locking the doors. He does not shame them for being people that are lost in fear. He brings them peace. He is a calm and non-anxious presence in their midst when they are full of their own anxiety, their own fears that life is threatening them, and Jesus says, 'peace be with you.'

In order to prove that he can deliver that peace, he shows them his nail scarred hands and his pierced side. Why does Jesus do that? I think Jesus wants to make sure they understand that it's really him. It isn't some ghost or figment of their imagination. They can literally see and feel his body and his humanity and his accessibility. They can feel and see his presence. And that helps them to relax. It's really you,

Lord. It's not some apparition or figment of our imagination. He proves himself trustworthy to their trust in the midst of their fear. We find relief in the midst of our fears when we discover that in fact Jesus and the presence of God, is right there with us in our fear.

Jesus gives the disciples not just a sense of relief on their own, but then he gives them the Holy Spirit to go out and to share what he has given them. Receive the Holy Spirit and I send you out as the Father has sent me in here.

When you've received the peace of Christ you have the freedom now to go out and be with others in their fears. Jesus gives us the spirit of peace. And he doesn't leave us in the locked space. He sends us out to be with others. We must work through our own fears, and our own locked spaces, and then be free to go out and be with others in their fears and locked spaces.

You see if we don't work through our fear then sometimes when we're going be with others, we don't really give them peace, we add to their anxiety because we bring our anxiety with us. Thanks a lot for visiting me now I'm twice as worried and fearful as I was before. Please stay home next time. [LAUGHTER] It is important that we do not multiply our friends' fears, but that we bring peace into their locked room.

I have some fears as I've said a few times before, where I ask Christ to meet me in my fears. I have a fear of spiders. And of course I've told the story that God gave me the gift of a brother who's an internationally known spider man. He's helped me deal with my fear of spiders. I also have a fear of small places. I guess

that goes with my size. And that is particularly in small airplanes. I can get claustrophobia. You really don't want to sit next to me if I'm in a small airplane because I will be sharing my peace with you. I have those moments where I pray, Lord help me with my fear. I need you in this space.

Sometimes we even lock ourselves off from God. We would rather not have the conversation with God, because in having the conversation with God we'll have to face some things about ourselves that we'd rather not look at. That's really what happens in Genesis 3, and Adam and Eve, realizing they're naked before God and they go off and hide. Where are you? We're hiding in here Lord, we don't want to talk to you. We're too vulnerable. We lock ourselves off from God. We shut Jesus out even though Jesus might be there in the same room with us.

Remember when Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom of God to Peter? Remember the words that Jesus spoke to him? Whatever you bind or lock on earth will be bound or locked in Heaven. Whatever you loose or unlock on earth will be loosed or unlocked in Heaven. Now we in the protestant tradition believe that those keys are given to every person who does ministry in the name of Jesus. You carry keys with you. And those keys can unlock other people's closed spaces. Or if you forget your keys or you don't get in touch with your keys, you can leave them locked up because no one else is visiting them.

Every one of us has a ministry not only to release our own space, but to go and help others be released in their space. Our call is to be like Jesus, to receive that gift of peace and then to go share it with others. That's what we act out