



northminster presbyterian church

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SCRIPTURE: Acts 5:27-32 John 20:19-31

SERMON: Click, Click, Click (Rev. Susan Haynes)

Will Willimon, former dean of the Chapel at Duke University, and one of this country's most respected preachers, tells this story. When he served a church in the inner city, he would visit a huge, decaying apartment building in one of the poorer sections of the city. Several of his older members lived there. Willimon says it was a chore to visit there. Parking was difficult. He had to show identification and a guard had to check a list. The building was dark, dingy and uninviting. At the apartment door of one of his members, when Willimon would knock on the door, the voice from within would say, "Who is it?" Willimon would respond, "Your pastor." And then the clicking would begin. First the slide bolt... *click!* Then the chain lock... *click!* Then the deadbolt... *click!* Finally, the fumbling with the doorknob.

Willimon says all this "click, click, click" seemed a rebuke to his visit. He was risking life and limb to visit in a none-too-appealing situation. Those locks said to him that the occupants within would probably get along without his visit. Of course, once all those locks, those clicks ended and the door was opened, he always received a warm greeting and Willimon was glad he had come to visit because he was one of the few visitors those people ever had.

Nevertheless, he says, it was that "click, click, click" that made those visits difficult. That sound was the first thing he heard before seeing his parishioner and the last thing he heard as he walked away, as the parishioner closed the door and fastened the deadbolt... *click!* Then the chain lock... *click!* Then the slide bolt... *click!* Willimon understood that the locks were designed to keep out people who might do his parishioners harm, but he couldn't help but think they were designed to keep him out as well.

There are many different kinds of locks, but the one thing they all have in common is that we use them because there is something we fear. Locks can work two ways: they can stop intrusion into our lives *or* they can prevent us from entering into the world beyond the locks. It is only natural for us to do those things necessary to protect ourselves when we feel we are in danger of being harmed. *Click, click, click.* It is the way we are wired. For those of us more scientifically minded, it is what scientists call the reaction of the reptilian brain; that part of our brain that functions at the most basic level... the animal instinct within us.

The disciples' reptilian brains were in full function mode that night of the resurrection. I think we who are on this side of the resurrection 2000 years later may look with disdain upon the reaction of the disciples. They had abandoned their leader, their Lord and Savior, and now they have locked themselves up because they are afraid; afraid that the same people who had killed Jesus would hunt them down and kill them also. You know... that guilt by association thing. But can we really blame them? Would we have behaved any differently than they, given the situation?

This is only conjecture on my part, but I wonder if they were also locking themselves off for other reasons. Perhaps they did not want to face the scorn of their families and friends. They did not want to hear someone say to them, "Some Messiah you had! Where is your Lord and Savior now?"

Had they been duped? Had they fallen under the spell of some dynamic personality? Yes, there were those signs and miracles ...Lazarus walking out of the tomb after being dead for four days ...the woman whose flow of blood was stopped when she had touched Jesus' garment ...the man who was healed after his friends got him to Jesus by letting him down through the roof of that house. Jesus said he would bring God's kingdom and peace to the world, but now??

There are all sorts of things we fear, that cause us to slam the door and fasten the deadbolt... *click!* Fasten the chain lock... *click!* Fasten the deadbolt... *click!* And then lean against the door in relief, confident we are safe and secure.

What the disciples didn't realize that first Easter night, what we still don't realize, is that by locking doors out of fear of the world and what it might do to us, we also may lock out *what Jesus might do to us!*

Perhaps some of us have been hurt by someone we love. Rather than risk being hurt again, it's better to close the door and click all the locks. If you can't have love, at least you can have the security of knowing you won't feel that pain again.

Perhaps circumstances have caused some of us to struggle financially. And the deeper the hole gets, the more we lock ourselves off from those who could and would find ways to encourage us.

Perhaps some of us are in an abusive relationship, but we would rather lock the doors to the fake façade we present to the world than admit we don't have a loving and caring partner.

Perhaps some of us have received a life-threatening diagnosis. It's much easier to lock the door to our emotions than face the realities of what that diagnosis can mean for us.

Perhaps some of us are addicted to something, such as gambling, alcohol or sex, and it's much easier to shut the door and throw those locks and continue living in the addiction than to face the addiction and get the appropriate help.

Perhaps some of us are struggling in our faith right now. Better to click all the locks than admit to our Christian brothers and sisters that we wake up in the middle of the night and ask, *"Is there really a God?"*

That first resurrection Sunday evening Jesus was trying to get to the disciples to bless them, to give them peace, to forgive them and to empower them. Of course, the disciples didn't realize that in locking out the world, they were also potentially locking out Jesus. *But Jesus would not be locked out!*

The wonderful, yes, the *incredible* news of Easter, is that our securely locked doors are not a problem for Jesus. Death could not hold Jesus in the tomb, so any "locks" we manufacture cannot keep Jesus from getting to us.

Think about it. Who else but our wonderfully resourceful and imaginative God would have come up with the idea of becoming human and living among fallen creation to restore the relationship between creator and creation?

I believe with all my heart that we can click all the locks we want. We can shut ourselves off in a myriad of ways from Jesus. But there is no lock in this world that can keep Jesus from getting to us. Make no mistake... Jesus is coming into our lives to bless us, to give us peace, to forgive us, and to empower us.

There are no amount of clicks that will keep Jesus from intruding in your life and my life. For that I hope you will join me in saying, *Thanks be to God. Jesus Christ is risen! Alleluia! Amen.*

Acts 5:27-32

27When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, 28saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." 29But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. 30The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. 31God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

John 20:19-31

19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." 26A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." 30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

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