

Petertide - Matthew 16.13-19

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven”.

Is the purpose of the keys of the kingdom to open up the doors of heaven or lock people out?

Of course the purpose of keys is to lock things up and keep them safe, we lock up our bikes our cars our houses. We try to lock up our computer systems to stop people hacking into our private information...

However Matthew 10:39, a verse from last week's passage, could illustrate the out workings of our desire to protect what is “ours”. *Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.* As we get more stuff, we spend more and more energy locking up **our** stuff and keeping it safe and we have less energy and attention for those things that may be eternally important.

But worse than this, how much energy and attention has the church wasted over the centuries trying to define who is in and who is out. Who can be included and who must be excluded.

Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven and at Pentecost Peter gave a testimony that flung open the gates of heaven – people from all over the Middle East heard it, were liberated and went back to their own countries and shared the good news.

So what was this good news? The good news was that Jesus was the key that unlocks the gates of heaven. He died on the cross and went, as Jews believed all folk do, to Hades. But for the first time Hades could not keep hold this man. The good news was that Jesus had broken the power of death and opened the gates of heaven to all, and his resurrection proved that Peter's declaration of faith, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’ was true. God had come to earth as a human baby grown up amongst us and shown us that we could live differently. Humanity murdered God but God could not stay dead and rather than giving us a death sentence for our crimes God forgave us and freed us. Instead of a death sentence God offered us a place in God's family – life in all its fullness.

Jesus trusted Peter, a big mouthed, big hearted, simple man who would ultimately deny Jesus.

Jesus trusted Peter and Jesus trusts you and me with the same key he gave Peter. Jesus trusts us to open the gates of heaven to all who recognise what good news Jesus' life, death and resurrection is for humanity.

And just as the early part of the book of Acts reveals Peter and the early church having to enlarge their vision as to who Jesus was inviting into the family of God. So we too in this new era need to allow the Holy Spirit to provoke us into recognising the family resemblance that the whole of humanity has to those who know they are part of God's children.

Jesus has given you and me the key to the kingdom of heaven – how are we going to use it?