

Wesley United Methodist Church

April 17, 2016

"Did You Leave the Door Open?"

John 10:7-10, 22-30

At the magnificent cathedral in Milan, Italy, there are three possible doorways to gain entrance to that building. Over the left doorway is carved an inscription that reads: "All that which pleases is but for a moment." Above the door on the right is written: "All that which troubles is but for a moment." Over the central door is the inscription: "That only is important which is eternal."

This example reminds us that the doors we open--and the doors we allow ourselves to go through, determine not only the kind and quality of life we choose, but also our eternal destination.

Jesus is at the Feast of Tabernacles (Dedication). It is amazing what happens when Jesus goes to church.

In John 10:1-21 we find the image of our Lord as the Good Shepherd. Today we will deal with the image of a door or gatekeeper. We know from other Scripture such as John 7:43, John 8:59 and John 9:22 that opposition to Jesus was growing. It was intense. It was almost to a boiling point, ready to erupt and Jesus lets the religious authorities know that he is not the imposter--they are. This does not exactly build good public relations. However, Jesus did not come as an advertisement for the kingdom of God he is the kingdom of God. Jesus let it be known that he is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecy. He is not a Johnny-come-lately, but he is the link between the Old Covenant and the new work God is doing.

One of the reasons Jesus was a great teacher was that he was a masterful story teller. He used the symbols of everyday life to communicate profound spiritual truth and insight. Jesus let it be known that he does not depend on fear, deceit, and coercion to reach his sheep. Others do that. He does not. The work he does is done in the light. After all he is the "Light of the world."

I believe he shares these words in John 10 to reassure his disciples that he is the true revelation of God and also to expose the religious riff-raff who might have been in the crowd at that very moment. In other words they were pretending to be shepherds, but really did not care for the sheep. They were in for the profit--not to be a prophet of God. They exploited people and abused them. They followed the letter of the law, but not the spirit of the law. Jesus was the Good Shepherd because he led those who heard his voice to freedom, not bondage.

When the blind man is healed in chapter 9, the Pharisees--instead rejoicing with him--retaliate by throwing him out of the Temple. They did not really care much about him and his condition. They only wanted to use him for their own purposes. However, Jesus did not single out the Pharisees--but others as well. Remember this time in human history was packed with religious hope and political ferment. It was a ripe time for all kinds of revolution. There were countless people promising to bring in the golden age. They would use war--murder--assassination--and other means at their disposal to accomplish their goals. These leaders would use the language of God and faith--but they neither knew God nor had genuine faith. The doors they opened led only to death and ultimately destruction.

In the previous verses, Jesus tells them that he is the Good Shepherd. Now, he changes the figure of speech from the shepherd to a door or gate. This image is taken from the normal work day of this ancient culture. During the warmer months of the year the sheep were kept outside away from the normal fenced-in areas of the village. The shepherds always had to be on guard for thieves, wolves, and other predators who would bring harm to the sheep entrusted to their care. As the day wore on the shepherd would begin to build a makeshift shelter of shrubs and other natural items to provide cover for them. The opening was smaller than the village gate. There was no actual door and the shepherd, who laid or stood in front, was the door or gate for the sheep.

Jesus brings that same protection into our spiritual lives. He will not allow others to use or abuse us--spiritually or any other way. Through Jesus we find direct access to God. We don't ever have to turn to anybody else. Jesus is the human face of the One True God.

Jesus is a different kind of door. He said, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and out and find pasture." The doors of Jesus are opened to anyone and everyone. All we have to do is to respond to this great claim by Jesus Christ.

How often do we overlook the very person who can help us in our struggles? Hebrews reminds us that "He is able," because he has known suffering, loneliness, rejection, pain, and a whole host of other problems. He is able to identify with us. I believe the Christ who is our Lord and Savior can even take the mistakes we make, when we open the wrong door, and transform them into something good and beautiful. However, think of the needless pain and struggles we carry when we don't open the right door and carry everything to God in prayer. Ask and it shall be given to you.

One day a rich tax collector named Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Jesus. Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' home. During dinner Zachaeus opened his heart to Jesus and Jesus opened the doors to his kingdom.

One day a demonic who had every door in life closed to him approaches Jesus. He knows Jesus to be the door of life before the disciples do--and Jesus invites this poor, tortured man to be his first missionary. Even demons know Jesus to be the door to life.

One day a Roman centurion--one of the oppressors of his people--cries out to receive healing for his servant. He knows that Jesus can open doors that nobody else can even budge--and Jesus opens the doors of the kingdom to him and his household.

One day a thief who is nailed to a cross alongside Jesus on the day of his own crucifixion--this murderer recognizes who Jesus truly is and has the audacity to ask Jesus to open the doors of paradise to him and Jesus does exactly that. Before he could be baptized or join a church, this man, who was hell-bent, finds himself being transported to the pearly gates. Talk about power to open gates.

One night a Pharisee named Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the misty night air asking about the door to life. Jesus tells him about the door, but that night Nicodemus does not respond. However, he eventually responds to the claims of Christ and helps to prepare his body for burial according to Jewish customs. He hears about the resurrection and responds by serving the rest of his life as a missionary.

One day a skinny son of a dairy farmer in North Carolina came forward to receive Christ at a tent meeting. He was not much in the eyes of the world. He probably would not have passed anybody's eligibility test for greatness. However--because he belonged to Jesus Christ--God allowed Billy Graham to open more doors in the world than anybody else with the claims of Jesus Christ.

Every human heart has a door that must be opened from the inside. Remember that famous work of Christian art by Holman Hunt. It is called "Christ Knocking At the Door." When you examine it closely, you will notice that the door has no handle on the outside. However, Jesus is knocking at that door. The artist knew that our Christian faith begins when we make a personal decision to respond to the Christ who is knocking at the door. If we allow him in, the gate of paradise will open for us. Did you leave the door open? and for whom? Amen.