



# Lexington Presbyterian Church

Faith • Fellowship • Service • Since 1789

## Opening That Door

Psalm 24:7-10

A sermon by William M. Klein

10 July 2018

7 Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. 8 Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle. 9 Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. 10 Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. (Ps. 24:7-10 NRSV)

1

At times we would like to keep the door shut, wouldn't we? There are some pretty frightful things outside our door – things that can cause harm – things that can change everything in an instant. But then there are some pretty wonderful things outside our door – things that can enrich our lives – things that can change everything for the better in an instant. Which things are which?

Sometimes the answer is obvious. You want to keep out a rapist and murderer. You want to keep out a snake or bear or angry dog. You want to keep a heart event at bay. The opposite is just as obvious. You want to let in a friend delivering a hot meal when you are sick or grieving. You want to welcome news that the war is over and your daughter is coming home safe. You want to hear the doctor say you will recover.

It is not hard to know when to open or close the door to some things. I'm afraid, though, there are many, many things about which you and I do not have very good judgment. This is as glaringly true on a personal level as it is on a national and global level.

2

To get us thinking, consider with me how Jesus was, in a sense, a door. You will remember that he spent the last week of his earthly life in and around Jerusalem. As the Gospel writers set out the events of that week, we look in on the interchange between the religious leaders and Jesus. The first thing we are shown is the triumphal entry where crowds of people throng the streets, wave palm branches, and hail the arrival into David's Royal City of their new king, Jesus.

John (the Gospel writer) then turns our gaze to a group of Pharisees who realize what is at stake. "It is out of control," one says, "the world is in a stampede after him!"<sup>1</sup> The religious leaders see that Jesus has pushed the door open. His teachings have called into question long-held religious notions. His behavior has led people to wonder about what really is right and what is wrong. Jesus' teachings and behavior have threatened the authority of the Pharisees...and some of them fear that once the door is open there will be no closing it again. They will have lost control over interpretation of the faith...which for them is no little matter. For, you see, some of them believe, truly and honestly believe, what Jesus stands for is wrong and that it will lead the people away from the one true faith.

1

If you find it hard to relate to what they were thinking and feeling, consider this. It is the same sort of reaction some white people had to the suggestion that people of color were and are fully human...or the reaction some men had to the noting that women were and are qualified to be ministers and Ruling Elders in the church...or the reaction some people had that gay people are a threat that should not be welcomed...or the notion that immigrant are to blame for all our woes.<sup>2</sup> In the eyes of some of the religious leaders what Jesus stood for was wrong and it was going to lead people away from the one true faith.

From where we sit we wonder why any of the Pharisees thought Jesus was wrong or why they were so keen on closing the door he opened. Couldn't they see Jesus was lifting up what God had been trying to get Israel to understand all along? Jesus came to wake them up...to awaken them to who God was and to who they really were at the core of their being. Listen to the way Eugene Peterson translates the psalm before us. "Wake up, you sleepyhead people! The King of Glory is ready to enter."<sup>3</sup>

The wake-up call was meant to help them re-invent themselves...or maybe better, to remind them that faithfulness to the living God involved not just what they thought but their behavior – their acts of forgiveness, mercy, and compassion. Jesus' wake-up call was meant to remind his kinfolk that their teachings and behavior were supposed to spread seeds of goodness, gratitude, and an awareness of God's grace.

This understanding of God and of faithfulness was and is the door Jesus opened. It is a door some of the Pharisees wanted closed. But you need to realize there were plenty of Pharisees who were pleased because they wanted the doors to reform within Judaism thrown wide open. They were the ones who heard a familiar chord in what Jesus said and did. They realized this was not a *foreign* truth...but a *forgotten* truth buried in the depths of their tradition and the human soul.<sup>4</sup> When they saw Jesus healing the sick and defending the widow and the orphan, they realized this was a wake up call...a call to remember that following God was always about loving more than following a set of rules and regulations.

### 3

Two thousand years stand between us and the earthly Jesus and the Pharisees with whom he had a lovers quarrel. A lot has changed in those intervening years...but there are some things that have not changed. One of those things has to do with whether we step through the open door Jesus opened wide so long ago.

I would say that too often we walk by the open doors to God's kingdom. I know I do. Those doors stand open. The welcome sign is flashing. But, like the proverbial bush that is always aflame with God's glory, we barely slow our pace long enough to notice.<sup>5</sup>

Our inattention may well have some profound long-term consequences. What I have in mind has to do with priorities...our own priorities, our children's priorities, our society's priorities. Too frequently we have unintentionally allowed some doors to swing wide open and others to swing shut...and I don't think we've given enough thought to what is at stake. Let me give you one example.

It is a dated example. I chose this dated example because it has become nearly impossible to even mention contemporary examples. Few people want to listen because everything is interpreted as being partisan.

And so I chose an example from way back in 2000...and hope you have enough imagination to draw the contemporary parallels.

4

In the Fall of 2000, Leyla Wydler was a financial advisor for the Stanford Financial Group in Houston, Texas, a financial services company.<sup>6</sup> She had come to the job with a sweet signing bonus and a large beautiful office in the company's impressive headquarters. Life was looking good. But within two years she was let go. No explanation was given, and the decision was not open for discussion.

What happened? Well...it seems the Stanford Group was becoming incredibly wealthy as a result of the certificates of deposit it was selling clients through an offshore broker. Clients were being promised a sweet fixed-rate of return. Remember, this was shortly after the collapse of the dot-com bubble that took place in the Spring of 2000. Internet stocks and the value of the NASDAQ plunged. And yet, Stanford was making money hand-over-fist.

When Leyla went with the firm she had an arrangement with the man who hired her that she would keep the assets of her clients in the custody of Bear Stearns, through which Stanford cleared its trades, rather than allocate them to an offshore bank. You see, her client's trust meant everything to her...and as far as she could tell the offshore bank did not provide any security for her client's money because it was not insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Company.

Six months after she was hired, the man who hired her was replaced and the new boss put pressure on Leyla to channel her client's investments through the offshore bank. When she asked to see an appraisal of the portfolio of Stanford's offshore affiliate her request was denied. After a lot of digging she found there was some insurance...but it was only for Stanford's directors and officers...not for its customer deposits at the bank.

Her probing did not go unnoticed. First she was moved from her nice office to a much smaller one. Then she was summoned by her boss and told she was being let go.<sup>7</sup>

Why did she buck the system? Why didn't she do what everyone else at Stanford was doing? Well, because she realized what was happening was not just illegal, it was wrong. Like the little boy in Hans Christian Andersen's fable about the Emperor's new clothes who dared to say, "The king is not wearing new clothes...he's naked," she refused to act as if what was going on was not fraud. Certainly everyone else at Stanford saw what she saw. So why didn't they do the right thing? Was the money just so good that it became easier and easier to put their sense of right and wrong on a shelf? Was she the only broker with integrity?

The door was open to every broker at Stanford. Why did Leyla choose the door she chose? Or for me the larger question is this: why didn't every broker at Stanford choose that same door...the right door? Why was and is her choice so noteworthy!

5

Why do you choose as you choose? Is it something you were born with? Is it something you learned in your home or at church? Is it even something you could explain?

Jesus said, "Come to me all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest."<sup>8</sup> What keeps you from stepping through that wide-open door into his

3

waiting embrace? He said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me...and you will find rest for your souls."<sup>9</sup> What keeps you from accepting that offer? What would make you choose to pass by that open door? Jesus said the most important thing we can do in this life is to love God and neighbor.<sup>10</sup> Why is it that loving God and neighbor are so low on our list of priorities?

6

A huge part of growing up is learning which doors to open and which to let shut... which doors are beneficial and which are harmful. So often we don't know which is which until later when we have looked back upon our choices. So often we do not know which is which until we look back upon certain choices with deep gratitude or with sadness, regret, and shame.

You and I are called to grow up, though, aren't we? Most importantly we are called to grow up in Christ. That entails doing the daily work of gaining the wisdom necessary to choose which doors to open and which to shut. It means learning to choose the type of life the King of Glory came to make possible. Growing up in Christ involves training our eyes to see the open doors that are all around us...and trusting Jesus enough to walk through those doors into a quality of life we can only guess at. Most of all growing up in Christ entails realizing the door that needs opening is probably the door to our hearts...



Lexington Presbyterian Church  
120 South Main Street  
Lexington, Virginia 24450  
www.lexpres.org

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Peterson, Eugene H. 2002. The Message. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1945 – Peterson's rendering of John 12:19.

<sup>2</sup> Brueggemann, Walter. 2017. Gift and Task. Louisville: WJK Press, 204.

<sup>3</sup> Peterson, 938.

<sup>4</sup> Newell, John Philip. 2008. Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, xii.

<sup>5</sup> Reference is to the burning bush described in Exodus 3.

<sup>6</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford\\_Financial\\_Group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford_Financial_Group). The Stanford Financial Group was a privately held international group of financial services companies controlled by Allen Stanford, until it was seized by United States (U.S.) authorities in early 2009. Headquartered in the Galleria Tower II in Uptown Houston, Texas, it had 50 offices in several countries, mainly in the Americas, included the Stanford International Bank, and said it managed US\$8.5 billion of assets for more than 30,000 clients in 136 countries on six continents. On February 17, 2009, U.S. Federal agents put the company under management of a receiver, because of charges of fraud. On February 27, 2009, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission amended its complaint to describe the alleged fraud as a "massive Ponzi scheme".

<sup>7</sup> Press, Eyal. 2012. Beautiful Souls: Saying No, Breaking Ranks, and Heeding the Voice of Conscience in Dark Times. NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 131-174.

<sup>8</sup> See Matthew 11:28.

<sup>9</sup> See Matthew 11:29.

<sup>10</sup> See Luke 10:27.