

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

September 8, 2018

Community Prayer Service

Mark 7:31-37

This evening, I want you to close your eyes. Simply close your eyes and take a deep breath in. And then exhale, breathing out. Take one more breath in but this time let out a long sigh as you exhale. Relax. Really relax and just be here in this place. Now, open your eyes.

I want to remind you of one thing – your life is a blessing. Whatever you may be going through, whatever grief or pain or struggle that you may carry, you are indeed loved by God. I want you to know that these doors have been opened wide for you. This place, this church, has been prepared for you. So, welcome to God's house this evening.

This service – of healing and community prayer was designed so that as a community, we could come together to simply be with God, to take a respite from the world, and trust that by coming through these doors, that God would be here in this place waiting for us.

So, tonight, I want us to spend some time thinking about doors and what happens when we walk through to get to the other side. Because, there is a funny thing about doors...we are either excited to walk through them or terrified of them.

The good kind of doors are the ones you are so excited to walk up to and turn the knob knowing that there is a home cooked meal waiting for you on the other side. Thrilled when you knock and wait for the familiar smile of an old friend to answer. Overjoyed when you push a door open knowing your loved one is going to rush to embrace you after a long trip. These are the kind of doors we want to burst through...doors filled with laughter and love and warmth.

But we all know there are other doors...the ones where we may be hesitant to turn the knob and push open for fear of what may meet us on the other side. Afraid of rejection and disapproval, afraid of what we may have to do or say, fearful of what we may hear. Those are the doors we want to walk away from. The doors where you...

Walk through and hear that your parent no longer loves you because you are gay; or the ones you walk through and hear that your spouse is leaving you for someone else; or the ones you walk through and learn that you have a terminal illness.

Or maybe it was a church door where you were told you weren't good enough, that you weren't worthy of God's love, that you simply weren't welcome because of who you are, who you love, or what you look like. Those kinds of doors leave you full of shame and guilt and fear.

You know the doors you have faced in your own life. You know the good ones and the bad ones. You know if it took courage for you to come here this evening not knowing if these would

be the good kind of doors or the bad kind...but you walked through these anyway simply wanting to believe that whatever you may have done in the past, whatever you may bring with you today, that you can trust that you will be accepted just as you are.

I want you to hear this.... Whatever doors have been shut on you in the past, these doors at Grace will always be open. Because that is what a church should always do...welcome you, care for you, and accept you with unconditional and overwhelming love and grace, where you can experience hope and healing, mercy and forgiveness.

Imagine the man in our Gospel reading this evening. He couldn't hear or speak...he was literally closed off from the world around him, shut out, denied basic human dignity. I imagine him feeling so alone and hopeless. Maybe he had tried to get help before but had been told to go away, unwanted, door after door shut and locked. But on this particular day, he ends up in front of Jesus, begging for help. And Jesus, lays his hands on this man...literally sticking his fingers in his ears and exclaims, "Be Opened." And in that moment of opening, of doors opening wide, this man is healed. He is welcomed and made whole. Can you even imagine the moment right before he was healed, wondering if he would be accepted, praying he wouldn't be denied, hoping that Christ would let him in. And then imagine the moment he looks up at Christ knowing he has been made well.

But that kind of love and healing isn't just for a few lucky individuals. It is for each and every one of you. Christ may not be here to physically touch our ears and heal our wounds but he is here in spirit reaching down and embracing us as he welcomes us to him. He's waiting for you.

I love our opening poem and this image of doors being prepared to open wide...these doors are being polished, the hinges oiled, the entrance swept, knowing that you are making your way here to this place. That these doors have been waiting, keeping vigil. And now that you are here this blessing can hardly believe its good fortune that you have finally arrived!

That is what Christ's love is all about. It's the kind of love that heals you and forgives you. It's the kind of love that welcomes and embraces you. Because when other doors close, Jesus says come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. So come through these doors because they have been prepared just for you.

So now I want you to close your eyes one more time. Take a deep breath in and out. And now imagine Jesus opening these doors wide for you as he cries welcome, welcome, welcome. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Blessing the Threshold**by: Jan Richardson**

This blessing
has been waiting for you
for a long time.

While you have been
making your way here
this blessing has been
gathering itself
making ready
biding its time
praying.

This blessing has been
polishing the door
oiling the hinges
sweeping the steps
lighting candles
in the windows.

This blessing has been
setting the table
as it hums a tune
from an old song
it knows,
something about
a spiraling road
and bread
and grace.

All this time
it has kept an eye
on the horizon,
watching,
keeping vigil,
hardly aware of how
it was leaning itself
in your direction.

And now that
you are here
this blessing
can hardly believe
its good fortune
that you have finally arrived,
that it can drop everything
at last
to fling its arms wide
to you, crying

welcome
welcome
welcome.

