

Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church

August 31, 2025

Rio Rancho, NM

Rev. Frank Yates

THE LORD OPENS DOORS

Luke 13: 22-30

I am so grateful to our resident artist Betty Goebille for loaning me one of her paintings. It is entitled “The Blue Door” and in fact it is a painting of a blue door! Come into the pastor’s study and you will see it gracing the wall. It is quiet lovely. Thanks, Betty.

Doors are important. A looking glass becomes a door for Alice to enter Wonderland. A door to a wardrobe allows the Pevensie children to enter the C.S. Lewis world of Narnia. The Reformation began in Sixteenth Century Germany when Martin Luther nails Ninety-five theses on the Wittenburg church door. In 1963 Gov. George Wallace stood in the school door to stop African American students from entering the University of Alabama. Doors are important.

Doors of every size, shape and color are made from all kinds of materials. But all doors have two main functions. Doors open the way and doors block the entrance. A door invites you in. Or a door locks you out. People open doors for you. And people close doors in

your face. In our Gospel lesson, the Lord closes doors and the Lord opens doors. Doors are important indeed.

Passing through many villages in his journey toward Jerusalem, someone asks Jesus a question, “Lord, will only a few be saved?” It’s one of those hypothetical questions that seems innocent enough. But does it reveal a hidden anxiety: “salvation anxiety”? Do people who ask such questions stay awake at night wondering if they are one of the “chosen”? Not sure why this question was asked, but it registers a kind of universal angst.

The way Jesus answers probably increased the anxiety of the questioner. The Lord said, “Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.” Here Jesus seems to shut the door on the “many” who will seek entrance, that is, those who want to be saved. The door is narrow and will be closed to those outside who knock and insist “we ate and drank with you”, we heard your teachings. The owner of the house disavows them, causing “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” So the folks who thought they were first will discover that they are last. Left out in the cold. The door slammed in their face.

This is a pretty somber warning, isn’t it? Maybe I should have entitled this sermon “The Lord Closes Doors.” The emphasis here is

upon the doorkeeper, the master of the house, refusing entry to those who fully expected the red-carpet treatment. Instead, they face a “No Entry” sign. So the answer to the question, “Lord, will only a few be saved?” would seem to be, “Yes, only a few.”

Now you may be thinking about now, “Frank, is this one of those scare sermons?” Are you trying to increase the “salvation anxiety” in all our hearts? Let me assure you that I am temperamentally incapable of preaching a “hell fire and damnation sermon”. Having heard hundreds of those kinds of harangues in my youth, no, I will not pass on that kind of abuse.

Who am I to act like I am some kind of “insider” knowing who will be saved? John Calvin, even with his hard doctrine of double predestination, always assumed that everyone in his congregation was of the “elect”. I think that all preachers should assume the same. That is, a “wideness in God’s mercy.”

I prefer to think of Jesus the way the book of Revelation depicts him in chapter three. This is a complementary image of Jesus, the One who stands at the door and knocks on our hearts, yearning to come in and dwell within us. The Christ who seeks our love and our fellowship, offering to open the doors of salvation to us.

Christ knocks on the door of those rather lukewarm Laodicean Christians. He knocks on their door to revive them and renew their faith, hope, and love. His knocking calls for a response. To get up and answer the door if you will. It is a persistent knocking.

Someone is knocking on our door as well. “Behold, I stand at the door, knocking, if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you and you with me.” Doors are important and some doors can only be opened from the inside.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus transforms the question, “Lord, will only a few be saved?” Instead of making the door more narrow, like the eye of a needle that a camel cannot pass through, Jesus broadens the doorway. The door becomes incredibly wide, welcoming folks you would never expect. “Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.” So now we can talk gladly about how the Lord opens doors indeed.

The Lord opens the door of salvation to people from every nation and tribe and ethnicity. People from the four corners of the globe. A worldwide invitation is extended. “Come one, come all! No matter who you are or where you are from and what you look like or

what you have ever done!” Now the door is open wide and all are welcomed.

The book of Revelation describes the twelve gates to the New Jerusalem as made of peart, the so-called “pearly gates”. But the crucial part about these twelve gates is that they “will never be shut” (Rev. 21:25). And through those gates all the nations will bring their tribute and their homage. The Lord opens the gates of heaven to all the people of the world. These are not border walls. Now the gates “will never be shut”.

Doors are important. Doors block the entrance. And doors swing open to allow folks in. Like many of you, I am concerned about how many doors are being closed these days. Doors closed in our institutions, doors closed to our country, doors closed against our fellow citizens. I am troubled by the increasing hostility and polarization in our nation. Challenging times.

We are all troubled when a young man tries to get into a church and finds the doors locked, this time thankfully. Then he dares to shoot through the stain glass windows at children in worship. Hatred that closed the doors of his heart now erupts in violence to kill and wound innocent people. The doors of our hearts need

always to be opened to the love of God. Open to the Christ who stands at our door knocking persistently.

I am so grateful when doors welcome folks in, when doors gladly accept people “from east and west, and north and south” to sit with them and eat with them. In fellowship, in harmony, and in love. Church buildings will always have doors and I pray to God that they will always be welcoming and inviting. “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” A warm welcome, the hand of fellowship, the cup of cool water, the passing of the peace. Here at the foot of the cross, the welcome mat must always be rolled out.

On this Labor Day Weekend, I want to reiterate what I said in the Witness. Very grateful to Beth Miller for taking me to Rio Tech, a fantastic facility for high school students in our community. Rio Tech opens the doors for many students to have a productive career in various trades. Rio Rancho has literally opened the door to the future for these students.

I believe that one of our callings as followers of Jesus Christ is to open doors for others. Not just in the polite way we hold open doors when coming and going. But in that larger sense of making a way possible for people who perhaps need a hand up, a little

encouragement, some help along the way. Giving people opportunities to grow and mature-that is a Christ-like gesture. As we say sometimes, “Give a fish for but one meal. Teach them to fish for a lifetime.” That’s opening the door to the future. It’s what you do so beautifully with your scholarships for students. Paving the way for them to learn and grow.

So the church of Jesus Christ should be a beacon of light in the world. A light that illumines the path forward for others. An open door of opportunity for those often ignored. A helping hand for those wanting to enter and grow. I hope that our congregation will always be known as “The Church of the Open Door”. The door to grace and mercy. The door for welcome and fellowship. The door of love and acceptance. A door into the life that is life indeed, life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Here may it always be the case that the Lord opens doors. Thanks be to God. Amen.