

**Sept. 15, 2024**

## **Closing a Door**

### **Psalm 62:1-8 NRSVUE**

For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock & my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken. How long will you assail a person, will you batter your victim, all of you, as you would a leaning wall, a tottering fence? Their only plan is to bring down a person of prominence. They take pleasure in falsehood; they bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse.

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

### **Matthew 6:5-6**

<sup>5</sup> And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Today we continue our September series, where each week we will explore the powerful metaphor of a door as a way to describe and unlock our faith journey.

Doors and gates are a means to gain access to and from places and spaces. It is often used as a symbol of transition, or an allegory of beginning... Opening-leaving-entering; that leads from one state of being to another.

Last week we looked at what it means to open the door of our heart to grow deeper in our spiritual lives...

that leads to a freeing of the sacred within us AND leads to the love, grace, & hope of God flowing through us, pouring out into the world.

The series is entitled open the door,

which implies the door is closed; it's what makes a door a door,

It's what they do, they open and close.

This morning you chose to literally open the door & be physically present here at FMC on homecoming Sunday.

All our online worshippers, you opened your computer, iPhones or other devices & then opened your Facebook or YouTube accounts to worship this morning, or later this week.

All our students opened a new door of opportunity as they began this school year, a new grade, a new school for some...

Thus firmly closing the door shut, on last year's grade and classroom.

Friends throughout our lives, regardless of age, gender, race, class, or able-bodied-ness, there is always a time to open... and a time to close countless door.

It has been my experience that we cannot move forward, we cannot grow, unless we are willing to leave something behind... to literally or figuratively, close certain doors in our lives.

Friends if we are going to step deeply into our soul in order to grow in our faith as disciples of Jesus Christ, some doors have to close.

When we stand on the threshold of a doorway of opportunity, we will be there forever, until we make a decision to either go forward, or turn around and go back.

With either decision, we leave something behind.

Sometimes closing a door is exactly the choice to make  
because it frees us to enter a fresh opportunity of growth.

But at other times, closing the door is the worst choice possible  
because the closure blocks or inhibits our growth and keeps us trapped.

For example, when we harbor old hurts & grudges, we slam the door shut  
instead of searching for the doorknob to find a way out  
of our pain, anger, and stuck selves.

This week I want to focus on closing doors in order to help, not hinder,  
our transformational spiritual growth as disciples of Jesus Christ.

For me questions that can help include:

- What do we step away from in order to be more fully our true self?
- What is it we are to leave behind, so our connection with the Holy One grows consistently, with hope filled trust?
- When is it time to cross the threshold, close the door behind us, and move on to discover the treasures, gifts, and possibilities we have yet to claim?

When it comes to closing the door, some people hurry too fast I think.  
Some folk dilly-dally way too long.

Others muster up courage and manage to bring the necessary closure  
in the right amount of time.

Whatever our tendency, we usually sense a readiness within us to move  
away from the past, and enter a new doorway & pathway of growth.

Because we know of Jesus' promise that in God's house...

there are many rooms... We are God's temple, God's dwelling place,  
the house of the living Lord who resides within us...

and there are SOOOO many rooms to seek and discover  
along our spiritual journey!

Friends have you ever noticed how a situation, or a way of being that was somehow helpful to you in your spiritual & life growth in the past,  
has now become a stumbling block to your development & growth?

I know it has for me. So even though some part of us tugs at staying put...  
to remain exactly where we are, safe and secure;  
deep down we realize the time has come to shut one particular door  
and go forward in a new direction...

This has happened repeatedly in my life and calling.

\*In '92 was a Sr. Probation Officer with twin 2 y/o daughters, & I knew  
I needed to shut the door on that career & leave behind  
the security of that position, salary, benefits and seniority  
to walk through the doors of Bangor Theological Seminary in ME,  
and follow God's call in my heart.

\*3 ½ years ago I knew I needed to shut the door on finishing my tenure  
as a Dist Supt, because the local church was calling to me,  
specifically to the FMC of Moorestown.

A spiritually powerful reconciling community of faith,  
Who was coming out of the pandemic on fire for the Lord,  
and ready to open up all kinds of doors of possibility & opportunity,  
Who said YES to a five-year vision of God sized dreams  
to be a church who strives to be relevant to the community,  
impact all generations, & embody radical acceptance of all.

Each time I knew I was ready to close a door...

To say yes to a new thing... a new doorway to God's hopes & plans  
For my life...for my calling...to serve as a woman of God.

Each time...I knew because of all the ways I intentionally  
opened my heart to the Lord.

Oh friends, spiritual disciplines help with this opening & closing.  
Today's Gospel lesson has Jesus saying, “Whenever you pray,  
go into your room & shut the door, & pray to the father  
who is in secret, & your father who sees in secret will reward you.

Close the door of a noisy world, close doors of fear, anger, exhaustion,  
stress, worry; and open your hearts through prayer to God.  
Prayer helps us shut and open the doors of life! Amen?!

For me personally, when a hurt has been healed, a difficulty resolved,  
a love restored or ended, a sense of self-worth renewed, a grief subsided,  
a tightly wound spirit relaxed, a new calling embraced—  
we can close the door and move on.  
So, shutting some doors, can help us move forward. Amen?

You know in reviewing some of the central stories of both the Jewish &  
Christian scriptures, I see this kind of closure occurring repeatedly.

~Abraham and Sarah heed God's call to gather up their belongings, close  
the door to what they have known, & advance into nomadic territory.

~None of the healing and teachings of Jesus would have blessed others  
had he been unwilling to depart from the security of Nazareth,  
his home & comfort zone;  
& set out for the risky territory of his public ministry.

~Little development of the early church would have taken place  
if the Holy Spirit had not encouraged the disciples to move beyond  
their fears & closed doors of pain & distress after the death of Jesus.

Oh friends the closing and opening of doors  
are necessary in our faith journey.

I want to unpack a bit more the concept of closing a door...  
as a “leaving behind” of something, someone, some place, some action,  
some way of being and doing—

which can include physical realities & obstacles,  
emotional issues & struggles, and spiritual pain or scarcity.

Closing a door...gives us the opportunity to leave behind many things.

My mom made the very difficult but incredibly brave decision  
to “leave behind” a broken marriage & an emotionally detached,  
unloving husband—to take her 10 & 12 year old kids to find a new,  
healthier life together of safety and well-being.

She shut the door on an emotionally abusive and unloving person,  
to courageously open a new door leading to hope, love, and growth—  
as a woman who became a great single mom,  
who provided a healthy family environment for both my brother & I.

There are times when we need to close the door and leave behind  
the things that:

- ~Keep us from being our true selves as God's beloved ones,
- ~That keep us from living freely and abundantly as Christ promises,
- ~and/or leave behind the things that keep us from being rooted in God.

My mom's growth...my growth, did not stop with that experience  
of leaving behind a broken family relationship.

Because we deliberately chose to not carry old wounds and  
unloving patterns across the threshold (that any door can provide),  
into the future.

The closing & opening of doors are necessary  
throughout our life & faith journey.

And our growth doesn't stop with any single experience  
of leaving behind, of shutting any single one door.

As we open the door to other challenging life encounters,  
there will never be an end to closing doors & leaving some things behind;  
Just as there will never be an end to moving through the open door  
of God's new possibilities and greater freedom that comes through  
the gift of God's Holy Spirit and presence in our lives.

One of my spiritual mentors put it this way,  
we must be willing to constantly sit on the edge of mystery & **unlearn**  
what has helped guide us in the past but is no longer as useful now.

To do this we must be willing to ask the questions that will open us up  
to hear the quiet, powerful voice of God's possibilities.

This is why Jesus encourages us to pray  
by going into a room and shutting the door...

To close the door of a crazy world, & open the doors of our hearts  
to hear the voice of God, to discover the divine that is within us.

But isn't it so true that a part of us wants to be closer to God,  
to become something more, something greater in Christ  
AND a part of us resists?

Unlearning rattles us...change is hard...the unknown can be scary.

Yet sometimes we cannot move on  
without being willing to yield, let go, and shut the door.

I really appreciated this aha from my mentor about **UN-learning**  
as part of my spiritual journey.

The dictionary defines unlearning as the process of letting go  
of old ideas, beliefs, and habits that are no longer useful, so that  
new ideas and perspectives can be embraced.

It can be a powerful tool for individuals and groups,  
especially in a world that is constantly changing...  
and where innovation and adaptability are important.

So for you and I, this **unlearning** includes:

- Leaving behind regrets & self-blame over what we did or did not do.
- It means leaving behind learned patterns of response when we are hurt or betrayed.
- It means closing the door on old messages that taught self-worth, ego tricks that urge us to feel superior and overly important.
- It means unlearning the false expectations of self, or others, and

- Letting go of beliefs and theories we have guarded carefully, but now prove to be irrelevant and useless.

These & anything else that keeps us from opening our hearts,  
minds & lives to God; and discovering & sharing the treasure  
of our inner goodness, light and hope... must be left behind.

Friends what door do you need to close?

What needs to be left behind that is keeping you from discovering,  
activating & releasing more of who you are as God's beloved one?

If we use the door as a powerful metaphor in our spiritual journey,  
The closing and opening of doors will be an ongoing way to travel  
through a life of opportunities of what is yet to be revealed by God.

Closing some doors help us move toward further exploration,  
a deeper understanding of ourselves and the divine that is within us,  
and the claiming and becoming of our most authentic self.

The next right answer of who God dreams and desires for us to be,  
an ongoing becoming of something more, something greater,  
something wonderful, as God's beloved one.

Whose ready to close a door and fling wide our hearts and lives  
To God's possibilities? May it be so amen and amen.