

September 29, 2024 Threshold Moments

Matthew 7: 7-8, 13-14 *NRSVUE*

⁷“Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

¹³“Enter through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. ¹⁴For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

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

Doors have always been an intriguing & powerful symbol for me.

My Grandfather told me a story from his childhood
when he lived in New York City that impacted me.

His family had just come from Hungary and lived in a tenement building.
It was a difficult beginning trying to find their way in 1915.

But my Grandpa told me this story of how his Father gave them hope
and encouragement.

“Every once in a while Poppa would wake us up early & say,
‘Its time to greet the day!’

He would lead us up 6 flights of stairs & have us stand in the doorway
that was on the roof of our building.

Facing east and standing with our Poppa,
we would be in the place of the rising sun.

As the sun rose above the rooftops of NYC, Poppa would raise his arms
and say, ‘Good morning world!’

And he would have a big smile on his face.

Standing in that doorway with the sun on our faces,
we knew that everything was going to be okay.

Poppa believed it, so we believed it. In America, anything’s possible.”

My Grandfather, Poppa Jack lived to be 100—almost making 101—
and he always had that spirit in his heart and life.

A survivor of the Atlantic Crossing.

A survivor of the Great Depression.

A survivor of cancer at age 80...

my Poppa Jack approached life with great confidence and trust.

Perhaps without realizing it, my Great-Grandfather revealed to his sons,
Who then revealed to this grandchildren and to this great-granddaughter,
that standing in an open doorway to the rising sun
always reveals the direction of hope...
because each new day is filled with endless possibilities.

This is why for me, doors are such an amazing symbol of possibility.

~Hope in what may lay ahead in the new day, if I courageously step thru.

~Hope in the love that awaits when I return home to those I love.

Doors of possibility that, for me, always lead to hope.

Friends, as I shared 3 weeks ago I believe doors are a metaphor
for our spiritual life—both our inward journey...

the divine relationship with God we have, AND

our outward journey into the world...

the relationship with our families and neighbors,
church and work, classmates and friends.

Today I want to explore the powerful image of the threshold.

The threshold of a door is a physical space that grants passage
between two different external spaces.

It is a point of departure or transition from 1 space to another space.

Doors open and close, it's what they do right?

But there is also this space of “in-between-ness” of the opening & closing,
that is also part of what makes a door a door... the threshold.

I believe a threshold is another powerful metaphor that describes
a vital part of our spiritual journey.

This symbolic line marks the division between who we are now
and who we will become,
between our present awareness and understanding of God
and how our relationship develops in the future.

In our faith journey, thresholds provides space & time to ponder & assess
our spiritual direction. It's a time to slow down... and think...
and feel... And discern... And wrestle...and THEN choose.

Thresholds provide times for us to choose to step through an open door...
or not.

A “threshold moment” offer a significant turning point in life,
one that beckons us, urges us to look for further clarity
regarding our essential beliefs, our life choices, and our actions.

As Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find;
knock, and the door will be opened for you.” Mt 7:7

Oh siblings in Christ, there will be times when we find ourselves unsure,
hesitant, doubting, and questioning which way to go with our life,
wishing we were anywhere but on a threshold teetering vagueness,
mystery, and uncertainty.

But friends one of our greatest gifts is realizing the threshold
is a place of the Spirit, uniting the mundane with the mysterious,
the commonplace with the awesome.

And it's nothing new, these threshold moments...these calls from God
to move into unknown territory--The mysterious and uncertain—
recur throughout the bible:

~beginning with the banishment of Adam & Eve from the garden of Eden,
~to the Israelites passage out of Egypt & thru the parting of the Red Sea,
~to Jesus's baptism in the Jordan River leading to his public ministry,
~to Christ's death on the cross and his glorious resurrection...

ALL threshold moments that initiate significant change & opportunities
Never fully dreamed or imagined possible.

During threshold times in our life journey we too are being asked, urged,
called by God to open the doors of our hearts & the gates of our spirits
to the mysterious & uncertain, to opportunities never dreamed possible.

Friends the gift of the threshold provides a way to crossover
into a fuller life of spiritual depth and freedom.

When we choose to pass through the invisible boundary of the known self
and enter the unknown, we are saying: “Yes, I want to grow,
to become wiser, to be strengthened, to be less burdened by what
weighs me down and keeps me from being my authentic self...
to become something more, something greater
as a beloved child of God.”

And the power of the threshold is the transformation it can bring.

Think of all the changes that came as a result of God’s faithful people
Crossing over the thresholds I just named from both the OT & NT?
The world has never been the same! Amen?

Or think about what my great-grandfather did upon the roof
of their tenement building, standing in the doorway to watch a sunrise...
a threshold moment of darkness and waiting silently...
as light fills the horizon at the birth of a new day.

Each of these experiences reveal the thresholds’ power as a means,
a pathway, an opportunity of change AND undiscovered potential.
Threshold moments that can impact a person’s life,
or generations of an immigrant family,
or the history of God’s faithful people throughout time.

Threshold moments can cleanse us of false perceptions we have held
for too long, or that others have placed upon us.

They can wean us from feeding on what no longer nurtures us.
They can serve as spiritual opportunities where the soul grows
stronger in spite of doubts or fears or limitations.

Threshold experiences contain tremendous energy...and potential like the dawn of a new day that brings warmth, light & hope.

They can set an imprisoned spirit free, nurse a wounded heart back to health, & bring peace to a troubled mind, through the light and love of Christ.

But threshold moments can be hard.

Sometimes it's difficult to choose opportunities for growth & change. God KNOWS its hard.

That's why in Matthew 7:13 Jesus uses the narrow gate as a lesson on the importance of choosing to live life with spiritual attention and purpose. And he himself admits, this is no easy thing to do!

The narrow door enables us to focus on our deepest calling from God. The narrow gate helps us gain clarity, as we center more closely on what counts in our life and on what is required from our best self.

We learn what is truly essential & worthy of the life we are called to. The narrow gate has just enough space to squeeze through.

Today, Jesus says to us, "Do not be afraid to go through the narrow gate. New life awaits" you and new life awaits me.

A good question to chew on this week is:

What narrow door have you been avoiding?

I know it's been working on me.

How long have we been standing in its threshold?

Because you know...timing is everything.

We cannot, and ought not, stay on the threshold forever.

But life has shown me that we have to be there long enough for an awakening to occur.

Waiting in that cramped, uncomfortable space of uncertainty & confusion, & perhaps even fear...challenges even the heartiest of souls.

It is hard to know just when the right time comes
to make that bold choice...that courageous step & move on with our life.
To dare greatly & take a leap of faith. Threshold time is hard to manage.
As Jeremiah said last week given our culture of “instant everything,”
waiting is not something most of us accept easily.
We expect what we envision to occur now.

But the spiritual life doesn't usually happen that way.

People who grieve know this, those who know about loss, failure, & death.
They ask themselves frequently, “How do I get on with my life?”
after the death of my loved one or after the loss of my job,
or this debilitating medical condition?

Today I hear it as, “Will I ever get beyond the threshold of this dark,
uncertain time, place, and space in my life?

Friends, If we are to grow, I believe we must stay in the holding pattern
of such threshold moments until we gain its lessons for life,
& our inner-self develops, grows, strengthens and changes enough
To stand & move on, to take that next step into a new possibility & hope.

Usually we are unaware of the transformational value
of this in-between space, this threshold moment (however long it may be)
until we pass beyond it.

For threshold moments, timing IS everything, and it's never the same.
For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life.
But by opening the door and spending time on the threshold...
Immense gifts of growth can come to us if we patiently wait for them.

So other questions for us today: Do we ask, seek & knock...
while standing at the threshold trusting our Loving Guide who is Christ?
Are we willing to hold our fears gently & step beyond the threshold,
trusting in the power & presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives?
In God who will take our hand & lead us when the time is right?

There is such challenge, mystery & uncertainty we go through
in making a choice to grow in threshold moments.

This September our grandson Peter started 1st Light in the 3-yr old class.
Rich & I have the joy of taking he & Abby to preschool twice a week.

On Pete's first day of school, he & Abby were dropped off at 6:50 AM,
and we began a new routine with much excitement.

We have breakfast, watch a favorite Disney cartoon, get washed up,
teeth brushed, & hair combed for school. Pete also packs his lunch.

Well it was 8:45 AM and now time to leave for the first day of school.

Peter who was excited and energized all morning, changed.

Abby shot for the back door to head out.

But Pete stopped in the doorway between the living room and hallway.

Tears welled up in his eyes & my loud, rambunctious 3 yr old grandson
quietly whispered, "I want to stay here Gigi."

Pete didn't want to leave the safety and security of the house.

Oh how his soft, fearful voice and tears tugged at my heart.

I wanted to give into his fears, dry his tears, & scoop him up into my arms,
telling him he could stay right here...BUT I knew
that wasn't in the best interest of my grandson.

I kneeled down in front of Peter and listened to him,

I reassured him that he will love his school once he discovers all the fun
he will have with his teacher & new friends, learning each day,
and enjoying that lunch he made.

Peter didn't say anything... But he stopped crying.

I got up and offered my hand, & off we went hand in hand
talking about all the awesome things he was going to do that day.

At the drop off, Pete also took the extended hand of the 1st Light teacher
and walked thru the door, no more tears, no hesitancy,
and didn't look back once.

That was a transformative threshold moment for Peter.

He has embraced preschool with passion & energy, learning & growing through this loving, grace-filled ministry we offer to all families.

Perhaps this threshold moment for my grandson can help us grasp the power of thresholds & the tender points of encounter that are always present with the Sacred and Holy One.

How true is it that within each of us there is a little child of our ego self who is constantly faced with many challenges in life, so many doors, gates & passageways to choose & walk thru to grow... be transformed... to change...that are all essential for spiritual maturity in our faith & life journey.

Such tender points of encounter is the threshold moment where God is indeed within our midst, listening, loving, helping, and taking the hand of each beloved child of God's own making... Thresholds to an ever-deepening Oneness with the Divine.

Friends the choices we are asked to make at the threshold are not so much about what job to take, which home to buy, how much money to save, or when to retire.

Now please hear me, these are important and can influence spiritual growth, but the choices made on the threshold, are deeper and more far reaching.

These choices stretch from the soul and into the heart of God.

What we decide determines if we will develop qualities like compassion, unconditional love, trustworthiness, honesty, other-centeredness, and generosity.

Jan Richardson spiritual author said, “a threshold can become a holy place of new beginnings as we tend it, wait within it, and discern the path beyond.” I love that.

Our new beginnings depend upon how willing we are to tend
the threshold moments and the choices we eventually make.

Friends when we stop fighting the unknown and the mystery...
that will always be part of our lives,
and allow ourselves to linger within it patiently,
trusting the presence of the Holy...
that is always simultaneously within us and calling to us,
we will gradually recognize & make decisions
that further our transformation as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Our finest qualities faithfully await for us to bring them to life.
What would it look like if we were to welcome them today?

To stand in the threshold of a sunrise,
silently awaiting the dawn of a new day...with the sun on our faces...
knowing that everything was going to be all right...
trusting that anything is possible with God.

To stand amid our fears and uncertainty...
such tender points of encounter...
And taking the divine hand of God extended into our own.

A threshold can become a holy place of new beginnings
as we tend it, wait within it, and discern the path beyond.
Each day is a threshold moment. Amen and amen.

BENEDICTION/BLESSING

From John O'Donohue

We arise today.

May we live this day:

Compassionate of heart,

Gentle in word,

Gracious in awareness,

Courageous in thought,

Patient in Spirit,

Generous in love.

Each day is a threshold moment to live.

Amen and amen.