

# ***First United Methodist Church***

***310 North Rowley, Mitchell, SD 57301***

***Rev. Keith Nelson, Lead Pastor***

***keith@mitchellfumc.org***

***605.630.6586***

Our dog, Sophie, is a creature of habit. For the past 6-8 months our morning routine has been rather consistent. I get up and do some things in preparation for the day. Then comes the moment when I come for Sophie and we head for the garage door. I open the door, so she can go into the garage, and I follow leash in hand. She knows we're heading out for a walk, which always makes her excited.

Once in the garage, Sophie heads straight for the side door – the “people door.” There she patiently waits until I get there, clip the leash on her collar, and finally open the door. Then we're off and walking. As I said, that's been our morning routine for months, and actually still is.

Now with the nicer weather finally here, all of us in the Nelson home have been spending a bit more time outdoors. Of course, Sophie is always ready to “help” with the yard work we're trying to do! But the interesting thing is that even though the first thing she may see when going out into the garage from the house, is that the big “car doors” are open, yet she always trots over to the “people door” that is closed and sits there waiting for me to open it.

How silly is that!! She could be in the great outdoors right away if she wanted to. The door is open, the way is prepared, there are no barriers. All she has to do is walk through the open door. Yet, because of the learned behavior, day after day, of going to that side door to get outside, it is engrained in Sophie that that's what she needs to do even though another way is available. Oh, I've been able to coax her to come outside through the big doors. Once she sees me do it, she'll exit the garage that way too. But still her first thought or behavior is to head for the side door. That's what she's done for so long...that's how she's gotten outside in the past. That behavior isn't bad...it isn't wrong...it's just limiting her in how to achieve a goal...that of getting outside.

As I've thought about Sophie's behavior, I've come to realize that I too am a creature of habit. I've learned certain behaviors and traits over the years that have stuck with me. In fact, I've wondered if there are certain behaviors that I've learned that actually limit or hinder me in my faith journey and in my ministry. That's part of what the MCCI Training (the Conference process of renewed direction our church is participating in) is doing for me. It is helping me learn some new behaviors and abilities to help me be a better leader and pastor for our church.

I've also taken this opportunity to wonder if God has laughed at me (lovingly so) just as I have laughed at Sophie, because God has provided a great big open door for me to walk through to experience something more of God's love and presence...yet because I'm used to certain things, I too have simply walked to the “side door” or the experience I'm used to, and simply waited there to find God. There's nothing wrong or bad about my old behaviors, it's just that they can get in the way of the abundance and experience that God desires for me to have. So, I guess I'm going to start looking for the new opportunities that God is sending my way to help me grow in God's Grace, God's Wisdom, and God's Love. How about you!??

Serving Together,

*Pastor Keith*

P.S. This **Sunday is Confirmation Sunday**. We will be confirming 18 youth at the 11:00 am service. This will be a very special service. We will also celebrate a baptism at the 8:30 am service. Communion will be offered at both services, with the Confirmation Youth serving the church family at the 11:00 am service. Hope to see you in church on Sunday!! Come and join us!!