



Main Street Congregational Church

145 Main Street, Amesbury MA 01913

March 9, 2025 - At The Door

(Luke 11:1-13)

I was just a smidge behind schedule and I am just a tad stubborn and so it was a little messy and awkward when Laurie pulled into my drive last week before 6:30 am. I had not taken a trip down with my suitcase in advance but no worries I could handle my carry on bag and backpack on my own. I didn't really have the backpack on and so it kept slipping and it was difficult to close the front and storm doors to my house. I did it but not with grace.

It was a little chaotic filling up the cars with people and luggage. A shift here and there and a "how does this door close" question but we got the two cars loaded and we were off like a herd of turtles to Logan in weekday morning commuting traffic.

The minivan we had reserved was not available but with just about 30 minutes of waiting there would be what we lovingly called at my former church - a bible bus. A fifteen passenger van. Two large doors in the back which would be convenient for loading luggage except the doors open to the rear seat of the van and the seat and seat backs didn't move. Huge functional doors opening to nowhere useful. But there was the sliding door on the side and with a running start one could leap up onto the running board designed for someone at least 5 foot 10. While that large door was helpful for luggage loading and unloading it was a bear for opening and closing and one could drive the car even if it weren't actually fully closed, we tested that. Loaded up and chauffeured excellently by Cathy we got to our airbnb. We figured out how their locks worked and opened one of the doors to our house. Team members fanned out to check out space. Someone headed down the stairs to see what rooms and beds were there only to find a locked door at the bottom of the stairs. Would we really have 3 bedrooms, 4 beds and 8 people. No wait, out a different door, down some stairs and in yet another door gave access to the downstairs. From that side they could unlock the door at the bottom of the stairs and we now had the whole house.

Doors gave us access. Doors blocked our way. Doors kept our team and luggage in the van. Doors let us out to work at the distribution center. Doors opened to incredible sunrises. Doors kept the bears outside. Doors were access. Doors were protective. Sometimes we knew what was on the other side of the door and sometimes we didn't.

Doors are the theme and image for our Lenten season this year. This morning we are at the door, at the opening of Lent. It is the season in the Christian calendar when we walk with Jesus toward Jerusalem. Walking with Jesus, what a lovely gift and image. Toward Jerusalem, well that is much harder.

Jesus has been active in teaching. He has gathered followers, They are making a community bound together by God's love. They are living with compassion and justice in an oppressive,

violent, occupied land. They have Jesus right there with them for support and encouragement. It's quite a thing. There is inclusion and welcome for those who had been rejected before. Being in that group, feeling that support, spreading that love oh so very very good as they move about the Galilean countryside and shore.

Jesus doesn't stay there in Galilee though. It is good there and they are doing much but there is more. There is Jerusalem the power seat of the Jewish people and the occupying Romans. The place where policy is made. The place where empire is rooted. That's where Jesus is headed. He invites his followers to come along and he makes it very clear that he will not be well received. He goes further and tells them he will be killed. Into that he invites his followers, No false advertising. No pretending it will be simple.

Lent is that season of traveling with Jesus toward Jerusalem. A trip with much challenge that is taken in order to share and spread the love of God. It is not about being a martyr, It is not about glorifying suffering. It is about being blunt and truthful that there is a cost to breaking down systems of injustice and shaking up the power structure. It is about hearing and responding to the invitation to be part bringing life and love into the stagnant and oppressive places.

As we ponder if or how we will take our Lenten journey, if or how we will join with Jesus in moving toward the Jerusalems of our day, we are offered this story from Luke. This story which announces, repeatedly, God's commitment to be with and for God's people. Jesus first teaches them to pray. In the reality of life and all it brings at us, we can, at any moment open to God, open to love, open to acceptance, open to hear our true name "Beloved", open to the love that makes a way where we see no way. The bottom can be falling out and we can shift from the crumbling and invite in the resurrecting love that is loose in the world. The bottom might still fall out but we can be filled with love and know that we don't face the struggle on our own. We can let the healing and welcoming love support us and bind us together.

Jesus goes on to teach them about the availability and presence of God. That it is God's nature and practice to listen for the prayers of God's people. It is God's nature and practice to answer prayer with love and life (which is different from God being a genie who grants our every wish). We stand at the threshold of Lent and the journey to Jerusalem. We can decide if we will walk through the door with all the challenges and blessings that will come or if we will stay behind. It is always our choice. God does not force but the Spirit is always calling us forward and into newness.

It takes energy to stay behind, It takes work to resist the life giving love that is swirling around and inviting us through the door and on the journey. It takes courage to enter into something undefined and new. There is challenge and work no matter which side of the door we choose to stay on. On one side the challenge is about resisting God, life, hope, love. On the other it is about allowing the power and hope of God to buoy us up, to heal us and to flow through us. We choose where we want to stand. We decide if we will walk through the door and into the wild, resurrecting, restructuring way of God.

Fear and disruption are rampant. Cruelty and dehumanizing prevalent. What we thought was certain is no longer. Those truths are our reality. Our faith doesn't change those conditions but our faith can shape how we respond. Our faith reminds us of the presence of our loving God

who will not be constrained or limited by human violence or injustice. Will we walk through the door and travel with Jesus toward Jerusalem? Will we trust in love and let it give us courage and shape our actions and words? Will we respond to hurt and threats with an increased commitment to love and inclusion?

My prayer partner shared these words with me - words which remind and encourage me to go through the door “ powered by our faith values, we can counter policies of cruelty, bigotry, hate and narrow-mindedness with our faith values of love, expansiveness and generosity granted by God’s love for all of us. Let’s meet fear with love, exclusion with inclusion and scarcity with abundance.” Through the door, joining in with God, a more just and generous world is shaped and we have what we need to work for freedom, to love, to thrive.

Walking through the door can be as awkward and clunky as me getting out of the house for our trip, it can be as unsettling as the wind blowing through the not quite closed van door. With all of that unsettled Jesus reminds us to knock and it shall be given unto you, seek and ye shall find. If we had not gone through that different outside door we could not have connected the two levels of the house. What else will remain disconnected if we don’t go through the door? Amen.

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