



Main Street Congregational Church

145 Main Street, Amesbury MA 01913

May 18, 2025 - Do Me A Favor, Open the Door, Let 'Em In

(Acts 15:1-18)

Do you remember that Sunday when decorum and how it always is got tossed aside? When the choir went off the rails singing and dancing to a Beatles tune? I had that song as an ear worm for the entire week which was about 6 days too long and now the Spirit has brought me back to the words of that song. Do me a favor, open the door, let 'em in. I am not so excited about having it play in my head over and over but maybe I need that over and over and over and over thing to happen to infiltrate my brain, spirit, heart. To shake me up and open me up to new ideas, rituals, expressions of faith.

It's comfortable and predictable to do what we always do. When so much is chaotic, having a place and practices that are known can be grounding and feel extra important. When cruelty is raging, leaning into the grace of God is healing. When the bottom feels like it is falling out we yearn for something solid, familiar, predictable. We, curious, quirky followers of Jesus come together as church in these disrupted times. What a gift to have the enduring love of God, the unconditional love of God, the history of God making a way in the wilderness, what a gift to have those eternal and powerful truths to hold us and guide us.

We have those truths. They endure and yet the way we worship, where we worship, with whom we worship, that is not consistent and predictable. Those all shift, adapt, transform which can be life giving as well as challenging. When we have been shaped and supported by particular hymns or ways of worshipping, changing those can be unsettling at a minimum and perhaps disrupting basic understandings and experiences in the extreme. What happened to the Old Rugged Cross and Onward Christian Soldiers? Once they were so important but now seldom, if ever, sung. What had been a source of comfort and connection is never used by the pastor. And the beginning of the Lord's Prayer? Coming up to receive communion rather than being served in the pew? We have feelings and reactions. Some accepting and some rejecting. There are things we want to have stay the same for a variety of reasons. This yearning is not bad or wrong but we gather around a God who resurrects and brings life from what had been given up for dead and thus rigid, predictable, always the same as it was is not how it goes.

This is like what is happening in the part of our sacred story we heard this morning. There are faithful Jewish folk on fire for the good news of Jesus and living in deep connection to God. That is the early church. They know the history and practice the rituals of their Jewish tradition. Circumcision was one of those rituals. They inherited it and practiced it as had been the habit of all the generations of Jews before them. The early church continued with those rituals as they became a community following in the way of Rabbi Jesus.

They were on fire and their passion and way of being sparked interest in others. In folk who had not been raised in the Jewish tradition. In folk like the Ethiopian. In folk that had not participated in the ritual of circumcision. These new people wanted to join in and the church leaders wanted them. Some of the leaders thought that the new people had to do what the old people did in order to become part. Others did not. Our reading today is the council that was held to sort through that question. It was a significant and important question for those who had

always been part of the circumcision tradition. This is how they showed their faithfulness and commitment to God. Letting that go was hard to imagine. And yet.

And yet as they came together they talked, listened and discerned that God's love and way was expansive and inclusive and restrictions or practices of one group should not be forced upon another. Many thousands of years before the Beatles sang it, God declared "do me a favor, open the door, let 'em in". This sacred love is to be shared and accessible. It is a love that rearranges and resurrects. It can not be constrained or limited by our preferences or comfort level. It does not require doing what we have always done but rather suggests we let go of what we have always done when that limits access and participation in the community.

On a variety of levels we have the opportunity (or challenge) to be considering how we always do it. We are engaging in a process of selling our Parish House. We live in a culture where Sunday mornings are chalk a block full of sports practices and bridal showers. We are preparing for a different Pastor and Teacher. We have a playground instead of Sunday School. We have a government dehumanizing the very people or God calls us to care for. We have new people wanting to covenant in membership. We have a national budget stripping away support for the most vulnerable.

It's chaotic. It's a lot. How many of us want to blow a whistle and say stop, enough already. Let's slow down and return to what was more predictable, familiar, comforting. Yet our God is always calling us forward and making all things new. We gather around our God who is present in what is unfolding and becoming no matter how disconcerting or unpredictable that future feels. Our God who is in the midst of the fray and through all that mess bringing new life. We can celebrate the rituals and practices that have formed our faith without trying to force them in the present or future. God is present now and into the future as God has been through out time. Resurrecting. Restoring. Healing. Including. Creating.

Do me a favor, do your soul a favor, do the world a favor - open the door, let God in. Amen.

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