



Main Street Congregational Church

145 Main Street, Amesbury MA 01913

March 23, 2025 - Opening the Door

(John 2:13-22)

I had the literal and figurative gift of a few days of retreat last week at Kripalu - a yoga center in the Berkshires. It's a very curious place on all sorts of levels. The main physical plant was built for Jesuits in 1957. A time when there were lots of Jesuits and the building would have easily housed them all.

Picture, if you will, 1950s architecture of simplicity and stability. You might be able to imagine my room then, cinder block walls, 2 twin beds with limited space in-between and a retro sink in the room that hung over one of the beds. Bathroom down the hall. Taking a walk, albeit a bit of a distance, to get to the toilet was something I could manage. There wasn't a top bunk to descend so all was good. But there was a consideration of import. The door my 1950's room had been upgraded to a contemporary magnetic key entry lock and it locked automatically when shut and it was heavy and it shut on its own. I was very safe in my room as were my possessions but there was a whole mental thing to consider for that middle of the night trek down the hall. No I never had to wander the halls in my jammies to find someone who could let me back in after locking myself out but I was really intentional and thoughtful about that door and a key to get into the door.

Turns out the same door which gave me security and privacy in my room could have also been the thing that left me vulnerable and exposed and distanced from my stuff. The door that was installed with good intent could easily have become a barrier. If the key system failed there would have had to be help - maybe a backup key or maybe, in an extreme situation, the door itself taken off. The door and its lock, despite what good intentions there were for its origins, despite how it may have served over the years, if it got to a point where it no longer served, would need to be changed.

This is what I see happening in this morning's gospel. I hear this story as Jesus coming up against a door/barrier that is preventing/limiting some people's access to God and his response is to get the barriers out of the way. He is not gentle and mild. He is in no way subtle. He sees barriers and he acts to remove them. God's love, God's community is available for all. What gets in the way needs to go.

We hear details. Cattle freed and stampeding out. Tables upended. Chaos in the place that was the holy of holies for the Jewish people. Can you imagine the emotions in that space? How the religious leaders and keepers of the temple would be indignant, threatened and angry? This is not how it is supposed to be. Can you imagine how the people who were following their Rabbi Jesus were feeling? This story comes from the second chapter in John's gospel. The Jesus way is all new. Its the start of his public ministry. Just before this happens we read the story of water being changed to wine at the wedding in Cana.

This new rabbi immediately begins doing things differently. He immediately shows that barriers will not stop the love of God. Water to wine, enough for all. Tables turned and obstacles removed, access for all. The foundation is the eternal, certain, generous and expansive love of God, available to all, present in the world and powerful. That foundation is sure.

The things humans do? The figurative and literal doors that exist and get in the way? Those are real also but they don't stop the love of God and they don't prevent love from spreading and healing.

But there is this energy that comes from love bumping against hate, generosity bumping against greed, welcome bumping against xenophobia. Like what happens when cold air meets warm air. It's explosive and unsettled. Kind of like what we are experiencing in the United States and the world now. Like what happens when you want to sell the Parish House but the amazing deal falls through. Like what happens with the way things have been for decades at the church transition to something new. Like what happens when the doctor's office calls with hard test results. Like what happens when kids grow up and enter new chapters of their lives. The proverbial tables have been turned and we are confused and scared as I imagine the temple authorities and the followers of Jesus were when he flipped the tables in the temple.

Beloved we have the chaos and confusion aplenty and the trust of what God brings out of chaos feels fragile and faltering. In this reality of chaos and uncertainty we come together, we gather around the story and promise of our God who easters us day in and day out, we find our footing and foundation - in community, with God. We open our hearts and feel the fear and the love. We observe what is happening and feel the disruption as well as the transforming love lose and powerful. The pain does not have the last word. Chaos is not the end of the story. Doors and barriers that are being erected to distance us from each other and love will be removed.

Beloved, this is the way of our God - life, love, healing. And Beloved, the way of our God is for us to partner with God to bring life, love and healing. For us to use our lives, words, time, treasure to turn tables that are barriers, to pry open doors that restrict. God is calling on us to be responding to what is chaotic and scary. We are invited to be part of the healing and transformation. We are given the tool of love. With love and for love there are tables to be turned and doors to be opened.

We have very specific and powerful tools available to us for turning tables and opening doors. The tool that is right for the job which has been given to us. The job is to heal, The tools are love and community. Father Greg Boyle writes about this so powerfully in his most recent book "Cherished Belonging". He is the man who started Homeboy Industries as part of his multi decade ministry to members of gangs in LA. He is deeply immersed in the chaos of gang violence, drugs and hopelessness and his response and ministry lights up my heart with hope and helps me shape how I will respond to the chaos that are the close at hand and wider circle realities.

His treatment plan for every circumstance is healing. There are not good people and bad people. All are good. All are created in the image of God. Yet some are unhealthy and do things that a healthy person would not do. Doing cruel things is not ok. People who do cruel things are not healthy. When folks aren't healthy they want to dominate. Beloved we know unhealthy people and behavior. It can be harder, though, for us to think about healing for those

who are unhealthy yet that is the Jesus way. He regularly healed and his healing enabled people to become part of community.

In the US we live in a culture of retribution and punishment. We have 5% of the world's population and 25% of it's prisoners. We have built and normalized the largest system of punishment and imprisonment in the history of civilization. The president states that he is about retribution and punishment on steroids. None of this heals. None of this brings wholeness. When I label people who think or act differently from me as evil I do nothing for healing but lots for separating and fear. When I recognize that someone doing cruel things is not healthy my heart still hurts but it is a broken, hurting heart not a hardened, toxic heart. I am more whole and I can work to eliminate barriers or open doors to get healing to those who are not healthy. God just wants us to be whole. God is with us to be about healing. There are barriers to healing and they need to be removed. There are systems that prevent healing and they need to be dismantled. There are people that are unhealthy and they need to be in ICU until they are whole and not damaging others.

Sometimes we need doors to keep illness from spreading. Sometime we need doors to be pried open to allow healing love to flow easily and readily. No matter the action needed the tool is love and God is present. Amen.

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