

JESUS, THE DOOR TO GOD
April 13th, 2008 – Grace Episcopal Church, Haddonfield, NJ
Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close

How many doors did you come through today to get here? Doors are an everyday encounter for us. We usually take them for granted. Jesus uses every day images to teach us about God. One of the things we might come to understand today is that we encounter God everyday. But just like doors, we take God for granted. Jesus used the everyday examples, the ordinary, and used them to point out how God is present in our lives and world.

Today is the Gospel of the Good Shepherd, but I would like to focus on the other example of Jesus ... that as a gate (or door). What do doors represent to us? Doors speak about safety, security, and "home." A closed door speaks about privacy, possibly rejection or exclusion. An open door speaks about invitation, opportunity and possibility. I remember a time, in my youth, when we didn't lock the door to our house at the farm. People were always coming and going, but you didn't need a key. Now a days, not only are the doors locked, there is often three bolts and an alarm system!

There are all kinds of door customs as well. We knock on the door to announce our arrival. We carry the bride across the threshold to symbolize the start of a new life. We decorate doors to indicate the season of the year (wreaths for Christmas, now some for fall and spring). Doors serve different functions. They may hold us in and keep others out. But doors are places of transition. There are places of choices (remember the television show where you had three doors to choose from?).

Today, in John's Gospel, we encounter another of the "I am" statements. John is trying to help us understand that he identifies Jesus with God. The two examples we have today are the good shepherd (which is very well known to us) and the gate, or door. The gate to the sheepfold was an important place. It divided the sheep from danger and death. It was a passage to safety. For John, he saw Jesus as this avenue to safety and life. Jesus is more than just a safe place, he is a threshold to new life. In Jesus we have access to God, he is the entry point!

What kind of doors do we have in our life? There are the gated communities with doors that seek to keep "those" people out. These doors exclude and separate people. We have closed doors that speak of rejection, isolation and exclusion. There are prison doors meant to lock us in ... to keep us trapped. Too many of these doors are not only physical doors, but attitudes of heart and mind.

I am reminded of the painting by William Holman Hunt. Maybe you have seen it. Jesus stands outside a door, lantern in hand, knocking on the door. The one thing that takes a few moments to realize is that there is not handle or door knob for Jesus to reach. He can not open the door himself, it is up to the person on the other side. I think this says that we must open our door to Jesus in order for him to enter into our lives.

Think about the open door. It speaks of invitation, welcome and inclusion. Such doors, or gates, are about an openness and willingness for us and others to come through into a new

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place. This is the kind of door that I envision Jesus being. Jesus the door speaks to me about new life and a new relationship with God.

So what are we to make of this image of Jesus as the door. Three things come to mind for me. First, I think as Christians we are always door seekers. We are looking for God and one of those doors is Jesus. He is our best attempt of finding the new life we are seeking. One the things we might do is look for the presence of Jesus in our daily life. He's there, do we see him?

Next, we have to walk through the door. How many times does Jesus stand in our life, the door open, welcoming us into new possibilities and new ways ... and we simply don't see him or we walk by? Some day we will have the make the transition from our fear-filled, cluttered, busy life and enter into the peace and security that Christ offers. The door is opened, but we have to walk through it.

Finally, we have to be an open door church. It has always bothered me that we have to always lock the church (for insurance purposes, I'm told). I think we have to take the risk of opening the door so that people seeking God might be able to come into God's house. You know, people might just be looking at a time that is different than when we usually open the doors, Sunday mornings. Crisis in life doesn't wait just for that morning. The desire to meet God might come at another time. I have tried to leave the Church open during the week during Lent and Advent, but there is a need for us to do more.

We also are called to be an open door church. This means welcoming everyone who comes through the door. This means inviting others to come join us. This means being willing to be a place for searchers and seekers with the hope of new life in Jesus Christ. Not only must the doors of the building be open, but the doors of our lives and hearts as well!

As we move through the many doors we encounter today, let's pause at each one for a moment. Take time to look around and see how God might be present. Think about how open our lives might be to letting Jesus be the door to God. Use the doors, the every day encounters, be a reminder that Jesus offers us a new possibility, a new life. Amen.