

9/22/2019

“Open Doors”

Luke 15:2; Acts 14:21-28

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Theme: God opened the door of faith to all who would believe. United Methodists are called to have open doors -- to welcome Jesus and all who would receive him, and to go and share God’s love in his name.

Doors. Let’s talk about doors this morning.

If you’ve been to The Home Depot, Lowes, or some other home improvement store lately and happened to be in the doors and windows department, you may have noticed all the many kinds of doors available for homes these days. But, a variety of door styles is nothing really new. Just take a walk around Chesapeake City or most other places that have homes built eighty or a hundred years ago, and you could see a variety almost as numerous as the homes and their owners themselves.

As you most likely know, the basic definition of a door, according to Webster, is “a usually swinging or sliding barrier by which an entry is closed and opened.”

So today we conclude our three part series on the United Methodist trademark slogan, advertising and welcoming “tagline”, and promise of Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors.

From the Book of Acts of the Apostles, we read of Paul’s first missionary journey, along with his friend and companion in faith Barnabas, through modern day Turkey, then called Asia Minor. With their lives in danger, they had left Antioch in Syria. And after some time in the cities of Lystra and Derbe, they returned to Antioch.

Luke writes, *“They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported*

all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.” (Acts 14:21-28 NIV emphasis added)

Did you catch that, it was God who had **“opened a door of faith,”** as Paul called it, to the Gentiles. Paul was speaking to them about the response to the Gospel, which he had received among non-Jewish peoples of Asia Minor. Though the good news of salvation by faith in Jesus the Messiah had been proclaimed first to the Jews of Jesus’ own religion and culture, it was now available to all persons. It was God who opened the door of faith!

And this brings us to an important point.

† **Jesus welcomed all to receive God’s redeeming love and grace.**

Some of his fellow Jewish teachers and devoutly religious persons had trouble accepting that Jesus was so open to receiving others who didn’t keep the religious Law as they did.

Luke tells us . . .

*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, **“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”** Then Jesus told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that **in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.** (Luke 15:1-7 emphasis added)*

And although Jesus himself said that he was sent by God the Father to seek and to save the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24; Luke 19:10; Matthew 10:6), that is of his own Jewish people, by God’s love and grace he embraced a much larger mission as well – the salvation of the whole human race.

You see, the doors of faith, and the church of Jesus Christ, were opened by God – not just to devout persons and groups like the Pharisees, but to all people. And those doors of God’s redeeming love should not only be opened part way, or under certain conditions, but to all who turn to God, believe and receive in the saving grace of Jesus Christ! Yes, they, as we, would be expected to follow the Way and teaching of Jesus Christ – but as God’s grace provides, by taking the yoke of Jesus upon ourselves.

Remember, Jesus said, “*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; **knock and the door will be opened to you.** For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*” (Mt. 7:7-8 NIV)

So then, just as God opens doors and welcomes all, we, too, should extend that hospitality to others. Indeed, from the letter to the Hebrews (13:1-2 NIV) we are reminded of the Old Testament story of Abraham and the visit from the angels appearing as travelers at the door of his tent. The author writes, “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

I am glad when we show hospitality to family, friends and strangers alike here at CCUMC. Whether it’s for worship, Sunday School, fellowship, small groups that help us grow in discipleship; or groups like the Scouts; or missions like the rotating shelter or others. And my heart is always warmed when we can be of comfort to those who experience the loss of loved ones; or rejoice with others who celebrate in marriage, or other special times of life.

These are just some of the ways we open our doors to welcome all people.

The other purpose of open doors should also be noted.

† **Jesus also sends us out into the world -- our community and beyond – to share his good news and love with others.**

In God’s kingdom, all believers, all disciples, are called to service and ministry. All disciples are called to work in God’s vineyard in some way. All disciples of Jesus are called to work to build the kingdom of God on earth.

And so, we open our doors to go forth in faith to serve the Lord by extending the good news of God’s love to others. We demonstrate that love, not only in word, but in deeds and action. Many of you are involved in small group or other mission work in our community – taking food or volunteering at the CCEA, the Paris Foundation, or in other ways. And some of you already use your job or work to extend God’s love and kindness in various ways.

Some in our congregation are going beyond our doors, being in prayer for our neighbors and businesses as they take their morning walk. And our combined worship next Sunday

at Town Point will hopefully allow us to open our doors and worship out in God's natural creation for part of the service.

We also strive to open doors of opportunity and wellbeing through our United Methodist connections in our Annual Conference, our country, and around the world. Things like scholarships and other forms of assistance, disaster relief, social justice, or other ways to enrich or advance the lives of others.

In thinking more about "Here is the Church", as is usually taught to children, I came up with this somewhat revised version . . .

"Here is the church, and here is the steeple. Open the doors and welcome the people. Together we worship, we learn and we grow. Open the doors, and let us go. To see all the people, and God's love to show."

So, how have you felt welcomed in CCUMC or elsewhere into Christian fellowship? What doors have been opened to or for you? How have you experienced Christ's presence in Christian community? How have you heard or felt Jesus sending you out into the world to share his good news and love? How have you responded? Or how will you respond?

Remain in Christ Jesus, and go forth to love and serve in His most wonderful name, by the power of the Holy Spirit! Amen!