

Trinity 1, 2020

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God." (1 John 4.7)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Last week, the Lesson from the Book of Revelation gave us part of the vision which the Lord granted to St. John. It describes very strange and some would say even 'incomprehensible' events in Heaven. But the one thing we can understand from that Lesson – and perhaps the most important -- is the open door. St. John wrote, "Behold, a door was opened in Heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me which said, 'Come up here'".

This was the door to Heaven – God's own door -- opened to a human, a mere mortal. It is Good News for us! It is a message of Hope and promise, that the Lord wants us to be with Him and that He has made a Way for us. That 'Way' is actually a Person – the only-begotten Son of God, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He is the door for us. That is exactly what He said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved." (John 10.9) In order to better understand what this means, 20th century British evangelist, G. Campbell Morgan approached a Near Eastern shepherd. Here is their conversation recounted in Morgan's commentary.

Standing at the sheepfold, Morgan asked the shepherd, *"That is where you go at night?"*

The shepherd said, *"Yes. And when the sheep are in there, they are perfectly safe."*

Morgan replied, *"But there is no door."*

The shepherd said, *"I am the door."*

This shepherd wasn't a Christian. He was an Arab, but he was using the same language Jesus used. The shepherd continued, *"When the light has gone, and all the sheep are inside, I lie in that open space, and no sheep ever goes out, and no wolf comes in unless he crosses my body; I am the door."*

So, when Jesus says He is the door of the sheep, He's saying He's *the only door*. J. C. Ryle points out that no apostle or prophet could make such a claim. Only Jesus the Messiah could legitimately claim, *"I am the door."* Jesus affirms this in John 14:6: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me"*.

When Jesus says He's the only door to the sheep, He's saying there is only one way to the Father and it's through Him. Just like there was only one door to the ark and one door to the tabernacle, Jesus is the one and only door to salvation and entering God's presence.

Reflecting on this incredible gesture of God's grace – opening the door to Heaven for us miserable sinners, through His Son – the contrast of the rich man in today's Gospel really stands out. There he is in his house, wearing clothes of fine linen and feasting every day, while Lazarus, the beggar, his body full of sores, lies outside. The rich man's door is closed to him. As the Gospel says, "There was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which laid at his gate full of sores, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table". But the rich man's door was shut – his gate was closed.

The contrast is noted in today's Collect: "grant us the help of thy grace, that in keeping of thy commandments we may please Thee both in will and deed". In other words, the prayer acknowledges how easily we can be like the rich man, when in fact the Lord calls us to be active agents of His grace. He calls us to keep His commandments; In short, He calls us to be door-openers of Christ.

A few months ago, I was shown a powerful video from the Westjet' Above and Beyond' collection – you may wish to google it. It is entitled 'Josh – opening doors and hearts'. It is the story of Josh, who, as a young teenager, experienced the death of his father. During a period of grieving, he began to be bullied and felt very alone. His mother decided to move him into a new school – a risky decision, for sure. Through the summer months, there was much soul-searching. Josh says that he was sick and tired of being a nobody and having nothing to look forward to.

So, at his new school, the Clarke Road Secondary School, he decided to do something very unusual. He started opening doors for people. Not just for one person at a time, but to be the school's unofficial door-opener and greeter. The video shows him at the main school door, holding it open while students enter at the beginning of the day. It is something to see! Of this, Josh said, "Opening a door is more than a physical act. It's about putting yourself out there, getting to know people, making them feel comfortable, and making them feel welcome."

Lives were changed by this action. In fact the whole school was changed.

Josh's story, for me, highlights two things: how we as Christians are called to be door-openers or ambassadors for Christ; and how we may do this. Thinking about this, and looking into it, I came across this article from Ken Munsey of the City Church in Chicago, entitled, 'How to be a Door opener':

HOW TO BE A DOOR OPENER: (from Ken Munsey of City Church, Chicago)

1. Keep your eyes open: In order to be a door opener, you have to keep your eyes open for others and their potential opportunities. You have to look beyond yourself.
2. Hold tight to your convictions: The enemy wants you to be so offended by other people that you decide not to help anyone else again. Even when people do not recognize or thank you, hold tight to your mission to be a Door Opener.
3. Be resolute: When you start to open doors for others, the enemy will come at you with everything he's got. We have to be strong and resolute.
4. Love without stopping: Love, not obligation, is what motivates us to open doors for others. God loved you when you didn't have the capacity to love him back. He opened the door so we could open doors for others.

In order to be a "door-opener" for Christ, we must be compassionately involved in the injustices and sufferings of the world, while at the same time pointing people beyond the 'here-and-now'; beyond the material world; beyond the despair; beyond our scrambling to manage and control, to Christ, the Son of God and the Hope and Peace and Reconciliation that God offers humanity in Him – in JESUS Himself.

To do that, we must imitate Him. As He is full of grace and truth, so our actions and thoughts and words should be filled with grace and truth with the help of the Holy Spirit. How can we be filled up with Grace and Truth? The answer is simple: we have to work at it. We have received the abundant Gift of new life; therefore, we must exercise our will everyday to follow Christ. Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep my Word...". (St. John 14.23)

Christian “door-openers” are rooted in the life of prayer: in daily reading and reflection of God’s Word; in regular attendance at public worship and the Holy Eucharist; and in fellowship with other Christians. To be a door opener for Christ we have to care about our character. We have received the gift of the Holy Spirit! That means that the Light of the Living Christ is in us and we should let that light shine! Daily – and often times through the day – we have the opportunity to ask ourselves: how can I let the Light of Christ shine through me, in this situation?

Just as the sun warms the earth and causes a seed to sprout, so the invisible and eternal Light of Christ germinates the seed of God’s Word in us and the fruit of the Holy Spirit is borne in us: love, joy, peace, patience (long-suffering), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

In this list of fruit which describes the character of the Lord Jesus, we have a description of all that is spiritually beautiful. The first word in this list is ‘love’, translated from the Greek word ‘agape’. It is the same word for ‘love’ used approximately 25 times in today’s Epistle.

As one scholar explains, “Agape (love) denotes an undefeatable benevolence and unconquerable goodwill that always seeks the highest good for others, no matter their behavior. It is a love that gives freely without asking anything in return, and does not consider the worth of its object. Agape is more a love by choice than ‘philos’, which is love by chance; and it refers to the will rather than the emotion. Agape describes the unconditional love God has for the world.”

This ‘agape’ – this Divine Love – says all that we need to know about being a door-opener for Christ. Christian door-openers are called and equipped by the Holy Spirit to have exercise an “undefeatable benevolence” and an “unconquerable goodwill that always seeks the highest good for others, no matter their behaviour”.

That does not mean that we cannot say ‘NO’ nor does it mean we cannot discipline our children; nor does it mean we cannot ask the hard questions when they need to be asked. It does mean that we will do those things with a desire to lift the other person up or to show them that an attitude or action is not in line with the character of Christ as revealed in God’s Word. And, it

means that we will be people of forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness and reconciliation are necessary aspects of agape love. They are the hallmarks of the father of the prodigal son, and the result of His grace and Truth in our hearts and minds.

As we close today, there is the closed door of the rich man; but there is the open door in Heaven. The difference between the two is the transforming 'agape' – Love—of God in Christ. May we seek to be door openers for His glory!

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...