

## 2/21/18: Session #1

We are offering a series of programs during Lent this year organized around the theme of a door. There are frequent references to doors in the New Testament. Sometimes these are simply statements about doors being shut or open, but frequently the symbol of the door is a metaphor. Jesus says, in the gospel of John when he speaks about people as sheep, that he is door through which the sheep or people come and go. In that context he refers to himself as a safe door. Our lives are filled with doors. We have doors through which to access our homes, our cars, our church, the places where we shop, the clinics where we seek treatment. Some doors control entrances and exits. Some doors are locked, and some are open. Some closed doors are closed for our protection; for example, we might find a locked door on the access to an electrical control center. Our banks have vault doors which are heavy doors with complicated security systems to prevent inappropriate access and to protect the contents stored within. We have doors on our closets and at least on my closet door it hides a great deal of disorganization. Such doors may also help to protect the contents therein. However, sometimes doors (like my closet door) hide things. They may hide things I would rather ignore, or they might hide things that I find scary—like memories of painful or frightening times in my life. Doors also protect fragile contents from haphazard exposure—some museums might keep ancient fragile documents behind doors in order to protect them from careless handling or toxic fumes in the air. Sometimes we discover that things for which we have been searching are actually hiding in plain sight—they were near by, but we never noticed them. Some doors are hidden in plain sight, like the automatic glass doors at the grocery store. We probably don't even know how many times a day we deal with doors, open doors, close doors, lock or unlock doors. We have, like many of you, electrical doors controlling access to our garage. A few months ago, one of them malfunctioned and then the second one failed. We had ignored these doors for quite a while, but now we were forced to deal with something that had been hiding in plain sight.

Mark Twain told a story about the creation of the world and some angels that were assigned the task of hiding God. Various proposals were made—like hiding God on the moon or in the depths of the sea. These proposals were all rejected because the angels felt that people would rather quickly find God and perhaps thereby trivialize God. But finally, they hit on the perfect proposal: they would hide God deep inside people because, they reasoned, people would never look into the depths of their own lives. So, at least in this story, God is hiding in plain sight because people would never think to look inside. Perhaps that hiding place is secured by a door—a door of neglect or a door walling off uncomfortable feelings. If we ask questions about what is behind the doors in our own lives, we might discover new sources of joy as well as be reminded the reservoir of burdens that are all hiding in plain sight.

Aldous Huxley, in talking about human being gaining access to transcendent reality, used the metaphor of a door in the wall. The wall he supposed is between us and God. He felt that everyone had a curiosity and a desire to discover what was behind the wall. He also believed

that going through this door would be difficult because we are so burdened down with the details of living our lives. He proposed using mind-altering drugs or mind-shifting hypnosis to help people get away from the burdens of living and move through that door. He felt that any success we would have in doing through the door would be temporary—that we would have to come back to our ordinary lives, but he was also clear that anyone who went through the door would come back a changed person, someone who had found deeper wisdom.

The various spiritual practices of many different religions may be described as ways of gaining access through a door. Jesus said: “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; *knock*, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks the door will be opened.” He also said: “I am standing at the door knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you and you with me.” In these quotations Jesus reveals the door as a metaphor for a spiritual portal and that portal is a two-way door, we can go through it toward the Divine and the Divine can come through it to us.

It is our intent during this Lenten season to offer you a buffet of spiritual practices. Some of these may be new to you; some may be familiar. Some may appeal to you and others may turn you off. Each Wednesday we will invite you to engage in a different spiritual practice. Hopefully you will find enough variety at the buffet that you can create your own feast that will enrich your own lives. When you encounter one of these practices, we encourage you to ask your own questions—what can I discover here that is of value to me? I have discovered valuable learnings in things I didn’t like as well as in experiences I enjoyed. If some practice annoys you, it might be important to understand why instead of just rejecting it. By the same token, we often don’t allow ourselves to acknowledge why something appeals to us; discovering why something pleases us can be an extra benefit to the experience.

We urge you to discover the power and joy of being silent during this season. Experienced meditators often make reference to the chatter of the monkey-mind which tries to avoid silence. We hope to help you find the peace of quiet as we move from one practice or venue to another.

Tonight, we introduce to you a practice from Native American tradition. This is called a council circle. While we were in the midst of making preparations for this program, we learned that U.S. Senator Susan Collins held a meeting of 20 Senators in her office to work on ending the federal government shut-down. She used this exact process utilizing a talking stick provided by the senator from North Dakota. We will invite you to sit in small groups in circles. There will be a facilitator with each circle. The facilitator will invite you to speak to a variety of questions. There will be a symbol that can be passed around. The rule of the council circle is simple: only the person with the symbol can speak, everyone else will listen. The invitation and challenge of this experience is to speak from your heart and listen from your heart. We are also invited to speak spontaneously without trying to plan ahead (which interferes with listening!). We are also invited to “speak leanly”—that is not to be wordy or overexplain. We will not question or

challenge the speaker. When the symbol comes to you, you are free to say whatever you wish—to share some part of yourself or to respond to something you heard earlier. You don't have to speak. If speaking seems difficult, hold the symbol for a little while to see if something comes to you or pass it along. We ask that no one seek to monopolize the time—I believe that there will be adequate time for each circle to make 3 or 4 rounds. At the conclusion of the exercise, we will make a pilgrimage to the sanctuary so that we can be together at **The Door**. The facilitators will each take a lantern and lead the way so that you can follow the light to **The Door**.

Questions addressed in the groups:

1. Speak about some doors in your life that have opened easily for you.
2. Have there been doors that have been very difficult to open?
3. Huxley suggests that anyone who moves through the door comes back a changed person. Have you had an experience of change you would like to speak about?
4. Huxley speaks about the difficulty of gaining access to God because of our daily details of living. Have you found a way to move through that door? Speak about those.
5. What do the doors in your life conceal that would make you eager to open them? What doors might you be reluctant to open?

Closing:

This is the baptism of Jesus: [Scripture Luke 3:21-22.] “Now when all the people were baptized and when Jesus had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.” There is a reciprocity here: Jesus chooses baptism and then God chooses Jesus. It is as if when Jesus opened the door, the spirit came roaring through. That Spirit raised questions for Jesus which drove him into the wilderness to spend 40 days discovering and exploring answers.

Doors facilitate two-way connections. If we want to grow spiritually, we must open the door. What practices, rituals, readings, etc. would help us open the door? In Matthew 7:7-8 Jesus tells to “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; ***knock***, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks the door will be opened.” In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says “I am standing at the door knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you and you with me.” Eating together might symbolize a very intimate connection. Aldous Huxley compared experiences of transcendence to going through a door in the wall and suggested that if we do that, we come back changed. There is a risk of choosing Jesus as our Guide every day. If we choose Jesus as our Guide, we will be compelled to ask questions, serious and deep questions. Those questions become the sounds we make knocking on the door. Will we risk having the Spirit come roaring through the doors we open to engulf us with power and joy? Do we dare accept the endorsement of our Creator that we each are the beloved vehicles of the Holy Spirit?

