

"THE OPEN DOOR"

INTRODUCTION

Someone once said that no door in life ever closes, but that another door does not open. This is a thought that has been very helpful to me on more than one occasion. The symbol of the open door is a symbol of faith and of optimism. There may be a person in our congregation today who needs to be reminded of the significance of this symbol.

DEVELOPMENT

There are times when we feel that a particular avenue is blocked to us and because of this we'll never be happy again. We feel that when the door slams shut on some opportunity that this is it... that we've had it, that we'll never be the same again. An unhappy experience is not often thought of as a doorway to another happy experience. Certainly the person, for instance, in the throes of an unhappy love affair can hardly think of it as a blessing. Yet, many persons can look back, and at the time when the door closed and the way was blocked, it was a blessing for them. And ultimately, they have been able to think with gratitude about an experience that seemed so very difficult and disappointing at the time.

Time, I feel, is a notable healer of heartache, but we don't have to wait for time's slow healing. I believe it is better for us to form attitudes of mind and of heart that will protect and heal us in all times of need. I believe the most essential attitude is one of trust in God, reliance on the divine flow which is inherent in all experience. Certainly He who made the heart knows its needs and is capable of taking care of them.

One person I knew was aware of this truth and was unable to think of anything elaborate or poetic in a period of deep heartache and disappointment, but she kept saying over and over to herself, "God will not let me down. God will not let me down". In other words, this was her commitment to keep herself constantly in the flow, knowing that there was a divine process that was working in her life no matter what the outer circumstances might seem. As the poet says, "There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will". Well, in the case of this young person who knew great heartache, she kept the door open so that life could come in and it did with many, many blessings that far surpassed the ones that her heart was set upon.

FAITH DOES WONDERS

Friends, it is that kind of commitment, that kind of faith that does wonders for us. Yes, new blessings will always take the place of the ones we had hoped for if we will let it because the riches of life, the abundance of life, the prodigal goodness of life can never be exhausted! Remember that. We can never really be at the end of our rope though it may appear so. We can close our heart and mind on life, but life never closes its doors on us.

We may think that it has done so because the person has lost touch with life and love and joy have chosen a way of life that does not include us... has moved away, walked away, passed away - but the closed door is simply an illusion that is created by our personal feelings of desolation.

Our faith that things work together for good even though the good may seem obscure will help us to accept with courage and grace whatever may have happened to us. Even though the love and encouragement we seem to need have been withdrawn from us, we must never let our loss destroy our inner peace. Instead we must know and hold to the realization that when one door closes another one is already opening.

It happens to many of us that things are going along just fine....the way we want them to go, and as we take each step on our smooth, unruffled path we can look down life's wonderful corridor and see that all the doors ahead are leading straight to our goal. It's a good feeling. We're sure of ourselves; we feel a deep security and an unbounded joy because we know where we are going and how we're going to get there. Pause...

Suddenly, slam, the door ahead of us closes. There appears to be no key. There appears to be no device with which to open that door.

WHAT DO WE DO THEN What do we do? Some of us just keep banging on the door, brutally bruising our spirit as we rant and rave at our luck and fate. "Why, why....why did this happen to me? How could God let this happen? What have I done to deserve it?" What do we get for all our wailing and raving in self-pity? Does the door suddenly open and things rush to our cause to make up for the inconvenience and worry we've been having? Of course not. Certainly any closed door doesn't open just because we rave. It may open again in the natural course of things, or we may by prayer and non-resistance find a solution that proves to be a key to unlock the door, but most often the doors are shut tight - permanently. Accumulating circumstances, sudden happenings, accidents, natural processes often put blank walls where open doors once existed. So what do we do? Give up? Take the path of least resistance, saying, "Well, we must have been meant to fail with our luck"....

LOOK FOR NEW DOORS No, we were meant to look for new doors. They are there. The divine process is constantly working for us to lead us only in ways of good, so there must be another door opening because that's the way life flows.

Milton's blindness shut a door, but opened others to deepened sensitivities. Without that Paradise Lost would never have been written. Beethoven's door-shutting deafness opened a door to increased inner tone talent.

Lou Gehrig, called America's best-loved baseball player certainly saw all his open doors clearly and unobstructed, and then one day he was struck with a mysterious paralysis. A door was closed and neither the most advanced medical knowledge nor the sorrow of his devoted fans could open the door. Did he give up? No, not even in the face of a very limited life span. Instead, he opened another job by becoming a Parole Commission for this city. With vast empathy and outstanding courage, his service to others not only helped him, a so-called cripple, to walk with spirit upright into the new, opened door, but he was also privileged to help many criminals find new doors for a better life for themselves.

WHAT ABOUT YOU So....what about you? Are you facing a closed door? How did it close? Were you transferred to a new community? Were you discharged from your job? Has illness made you unfit for your old plan of life? Have you had some kind of accident? Have you been separated from a loved one? Has a divorce uncoupled you from another? Do you feel that fire, storm, theft, war or some other catastrophe stepped in and hurt you? How do you find the other doors?

There are countless ways, but here are a few suggestions that might help you.

First, you may pray for guidance that you are in the "divine flow" of an unfolding good - that no one can keep you from your good - that there must be some good to come out of the situation.

Second, you can turn temporarily from your own world and get involved in giving service to others. In this way you can become aware of the changing processes that bring about good.

Third, you can get a broader perspective by getting out of doors - go to the park, take a walk. Go to the shore and feast your eyes on the ocean, or to the mountains and witness their majesty. As Jesus said, "Consider the lilies of the field and how they grow." Get a sense of the natural flow of life - its power and its beauty - that is at work and try to identify with it.

Fourth, in a very practical sense take an inventory. Make a list of your talents, your experience, your problems. List the ways that come to mind, even the improbably means of how you can use what you have in order to find a way to move ahead. You don't have to force the situation. As they say, "Let go and let God". Get the feeling of adventurous faith, the belief that things are working for your good, that the hinges of a door have been oiled and are beginning to swing.

Remember that in the mansion of your life there are many, many doors. When one door closes, know with faith that there will always be new doors to use and open. Today is the first day of the rest of your life. That door may be opening right now. In the faith that it is, let us bow our heads and pray together.

PRAYER Our lives are not easy, O God, and we ask for faith and for strength to meet whatever circumstances life may have put there before us. Remembering that Jesus is the "door", and that no one comes to thee but by following in His path, we ask this in His name and spirit. Amen