

***Doorknobs and Thresholds***

Ps 63: 1-8

Matthew 25: 14-23

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*Psalm 63: 1-8*

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.

So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.

My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

*Matthew 25: 14-23*

‘For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, “Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, “Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

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Marty was a busy and stressed schoolteacher in Seattle and in 1981 he decided to use his summer off for some Christian study and respite at a program in Dallas. Several days into the program he was playing some simple chord progressions on the piano when he saw a bible near the music stand of the piano, and was inspired by the psalms. Almost immediately he wrote the first verse and the chorus of ‘As the Deer,’ practically straight through, and completed the entire song in just a matter of minutes.

‘As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you; you alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you. You alone are my strength and shield; to you alone may my spirit yield. I want you more than gold or silver only you can satisfy. You alone are the real joy giver and the apple of my eye.’

A time away for rest and renewal became a threshold, the beginning, the entryway, to a whole new way of faith for Martin Nystrom who has now written over 70 hymns. He stood at a once closed door, but when he turned the doorknob he walked right in without ever looking back.

Marty was given talents, entrusted with music and songwriting, and they had been buried in him, as though he had dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. Deep down they waited until the time was right, and then he took out these talents and has used them over and over, through music and lyrics finding ways and words so that Christians could sing once and pray twice.

When we think of our talents as gifts from God we do so naturally on an individual basis, aware of the different spiritual gifts with which we and others have been blessed. We are surrounded by those with two or perhaps even five talents who develop, use and grow their talents, we see and hear how they are turned into two more, five more in ways that share the steadfast love of God, the good news of Jesus Christ and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They have done well and are trustworthy as their talents are used to benefit others.

Yet the talents from God are not just for individuals, but collectively, as talents are shared and set to the right timing, as for everything there is always a season and a time for every matter under heaven. Together as a congregation we have our talents and they work in unison and unity as we have the opportunity for one, for two, for five, to grow. Today we are standing on a threshold in front of two doors which are just slightly open—just enough to see a little bit of light inside. In our prayers and in our discussion we will reach for a door to turn the knob and open a door all the way. Which doorknob will we turn, which threshold will we cross over, as we discern which justice concern God is leading us to at this time—Creation Justice or Open and Affirming?

We have heard words of worry, wisdom and optimism from Rob Grabill<sup>1</sup>, chair of the Environmental Justice Mission Group of the NHCUCC, about not only the climate and threatened creation concerns, but the church's role in both creating and resolving some of these issues and problems as addressing this is without a doubt the work of the church. It is as basic as Jesus' Gospel message to care for creation, and all that are a part of creation. It is as basic as loving our neighbors. Not only can we bring the strength of community power to the fight, but we can also do so as part of the process of recognizing and undoing the harmful work of the church in creating the problem over the centuries. It was the church that created the Doctrine of Discovery, which set in motion the age of exploration and the age of slavery. It was the flawed interpretation of scripture that led us to believe that we had dominion over all creation, which could be exploited limitlessly for our needs. The church helped get us into this mess, and we are obliged to acknowledge this in a way that can begin to reverse our course.

There is another role for the church in confronting the climate crisis that the church is uniquely capable of filling. We are all, every one of us, weighed down by grief that at the very least is undergirded by the climate crisis. We grieve the loss of species that we love. We are headed toward a world that will soon be a world without honeybees, pollinators, songbirds. We grieve for the children and grandchildren who will inherit a diminished and challenging future that they did not create. We grieve for what might have been. Our species had the capability of doing so much, and in the end we may be undone by unchecked greed and arrogance and self-interest. Churches know how to help

with grief, and this is a task that can produce understanding and even hope. We may be doomed, but that is truly beside the point. It's what we do with the time left that now matters. If we engage as individuals and communities to mitigate the impacts of climate change. If we recycle, and work toward sustainability, and educate ourselves about the intersection of climate justice and racial justice, and lobby and write letters and vote and install solar panels, pressure the banks to stop funding fossil fuels, we can make a huge difference. It's a unique and badly-needed role for the church.

Is this the threshold we cross and the door we open today?

We have also heard the words, the stories and experiences of John Rowe, chair of the Open and Affirming Coalition of the NHCUCC, as he shared with us times of heartbreaking exclusion, injustice, rejection and targeting for those whose sexuality is broader than straight male, straight female yet not always welcomed or accepted. He shared with us heartwarming and hope renewing joys, some that literally became life-saving. We have shared the experiences of ONA churches and members who became painfully aware of the exclusion, the rejection, the invisibility, that those who identified as gay or lesbian or transgender endured if they dared to step out of the closet, or held onto in a silent loneliness if they hid their true self from the world, from their family, their friends, their church. They heard stories from parents and grandparents who saw their child, their grandchild, experience the pain, sometimes with heartbreaking results. Strong and vibrant people were weakened by the unjust judgement, attitude and response of those who rejected who and how they loved. Some were orphaned, abandoned, estranged, by their families, their churches. We have heard how being ONA impacted the church in many ways, as in the pews, the choir, the lay leadership, in education programs and in social activities, openness and affirmation came alive, thrived and blossomed. Stories and experiences of healing and the relief of a true welcome abound, and these came not only from the LGBTQ members and friends, but all who had found a true place of loving acceptance for who they were, and the stories and experiences they brought. ONA is about giving and receiving.

Is this the threshold we cross and the door we open today? Which doorknob will we turn, which threshold will we cross over, as we discern which justice concern God is leading us to at this time—Creation Justice or Open and Affirming (ONA)?

What talents of ours shine today, lighting our way? What talents of ours sing for joy today as we step over the threshold to a new and refreshing grace, relying on God's steadfast love as our strength and shield? Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Climate Church--A sermon given July 31, 2022/ Smith Memorial Church, UCC, Hillsboro, NH  
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