

THE DOOR OF OUR HEART



Alice Fleming Townley
June 21, 2020
John 10:7

*So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate."
(John 10:7)*

During my evening walks this week, I have been paying more attention to doors. That is because I'm inviting you to read with me Joyce Rupp's devotional book *Open the Door*. Joyce uses the metaphor of a door with daily writings, scripture, and prayer. On Sundays, I will draw on the theme for each week, and you can participate whether you ever turn a page. Our first week, today, is the door of our heart, next week that of knocking on the door, third opening the door, fourth standing on the threshold, fifth closing the door, and finally beyond the door. On so many levels, this is a time of transformation, and such an appropriate time to reflect on passageways.

The doors that catch my attention as I walk around look a bit unusual, some are rounded at the top, others have interesting colors, and always a window. My favorite doors have been garden gates through which I can gaze. I am drawn closer and imagine what might be beyond what I can see.

In the 1500s Saint Teresa of Avila talked about the interior life full of doors that open to holy space. In this inner chamber our truest self and God dwell together. As Paul asked in his letter to the Corinthians, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). The interior chamber is often spoken of as the heart. In the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, the heart is the place not only of emotion, but also of the mind, the spirit, the body. The Psalmist prays, "Teach me wisdom in my secret heart" (Ps 51:6). Eph. --Christ dwells in the heart and enlightens the eyes of the heart (Eph 3:1-17).ⁱ

Doors to the heart come in many forms. Sometimes those doors that usher us into holy space are quieting breaths, moving music, a word, a shared meal, an important relationship, an encounter with a stranger. Sometimes doors surprise us, and what we thought was like a wall swings open.

And Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate . . .to the fullness of life." (John 10:7) Joyce Rupp wrote, "Day by day, we continually pass through the Door of

Love.”ⁱⁱ As we enter unsettled, we are held by Compassion. As we dwell with the One who gives peace, we become more grounded. As we grieve, our tears mingle with God’s. As we dwell with the One who sees us, we become more fully alive. Other voices of falseness, of bandits and thieves, fade away. The space where we dwell together with the Holy is a garden where we are filled with God’s breath, hear again the voice of blessing, and remember our deepest identity. In the garden we are renewed and recreated for the living of these days.

In the days before my father died, he began the annual planning of the garden conversations. “What might we plant this year? Potatoes will go in first, and then the canna lily bulbs. The red flowers will be beauty for anyone who passes by to enjoy. And then maybe this year some peas, and always tomatoes and zucchini.”

Now it had been awhile since Dad could kneel in the dirt; and over the years his hired helper, Jose, had done more and more. The garden fed at least three families, my parents, Jose’s and ours in East Lansing. This year my sister Christina and Neil joined the household and the conversations. “Who might be hungry this year? Could we grow more food?”

Those were not the only conversations. For months Dad reviewed with us favorite scriptures like, Jesus said, “I am the vine and you are the branches. Abide in me as I in you.” And core theology like God is love for all people. And he told of generations of family and who they nurtured in communities. We knew when we circled for family devotions or responded to a need, we joined in the story across space and time.

At the end Dad declined quickly. We held him in our arms and stories and prayers of love, as he had us. After he died and we prepared to return home, Mike found an unlabeled bag in the garage. Inside were previously opened envelopes of seeds, and a map of the garden plan. We shared around and carried with us those sacramental seeds.

While it was still cold and the evenings still dark, Mike and the kids filled pots and placed in the windowsill. We sheltered in place with big pots of dirt. Daily they watched, watered, and waited while seemingly nothing happened. And on a farm in South Haven, Neil and Jose tilled the ground and planted George’s garden. Each evening the phone conversations included updates such as, “not yet anything we can see, but we are hopeful.” In times of loss, and change, and uncertainty, that is what faith looks like.

Paula D’Arcy wrote, “Love does not come as theory. It moves in bodies, in nature, in the ground beneath us and the space between. True Love is not emotional. It is a different nature, waiting in us like a secret seed. . .it is a living power. . . .”ⁱⁱⁱ

We are in the middle of a pandemic, an awakening to systemic oppression, major changes at church, and so many crisis' in personal lives. And what do we do? May we enter the Door of the Divine and dwell together in Holy Communion, like in the first garden. Hear the Voice of Love. Be filled with Breath. Behold the mystery, of how a seed falls into the ground, and changes and grows up to be like the Tree of Life, bearing fruit for the healing of the world.^{iv} May we be renewed for the living of these days.

Let us pray . . .

I invite you to find your quiet center. Deepen breath

Be aware of God around you and within. Abide in me and I in you.

Be filled with God's own breath.

Hear God name you as good and remember you bear God's image.

Receive what you most need. Peace, rest, strength. Let these grow in you.

As others come to mind, hold them in this loving flow of holy communion.

Take a few more deep breaths.

Know that you can open this door and return here often. Amen.

(I preached this sermon from my garden, in front of Dad's peas growing tall on my garden gate.)

ⁱ 6-7, Excerpts from *Open the Door* by Joyce Rupp copyright © 2008. Used with the permission of the publisher, Sorin Books®, an imprint of Ave Maria Press®, Inc., Notre Dame, Indiana 46556. www.avemariapress.com.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Paula D'Arcy, "Freedom to Love," June 16, 2020, *Center for Action and Contemplation*, <https://cac.org/freedom-to-love-2020-06-16/>

^{iv} Revelations 22