

The Inner Door

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Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

7th Sunday after Pentecost - July 24, 2022

Texts: Colossians 2:6-10, Luke 11:1-13

Colossians 2.6-10

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority

Luke 11.1-13

After visiting the home of Martha and Mary, Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.” And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given 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. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Your Word, our light; your grace, our hope; your love, our life. Thanks be to God.

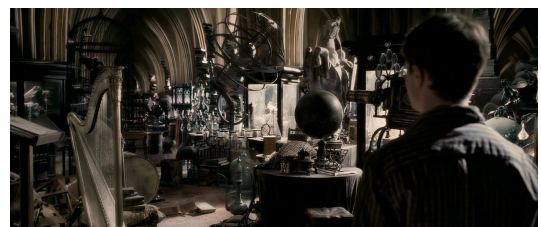


Have you ever had this dream? The one where you are in your own familiar home and suddenly you notice an inside door you've never seen before? You are amazed and curious; you open the door and discover on the other side a whole section of the house you never knew was there. You walk through. Sunlight is pouring through open windows, there are books on shelves, and comfortable chairs. Your heart pounds with excitement and longing. And you think, wow, this has been here all along and I never realized it! I can finally be still for a while, away from the demands of work and family. I can just abide here for now, safe and cared for.

Of course, we know that everything in our dreams represents some part of ourselves. I love that dream. And I love the reality, too. I love that there is a place within myself where I can retreat when my soul needs rest, needs to be nurtured, needs to be loved.

It's called prayer. Jesus went through that inner door often. Finally the disciples asked him, "Teach us about this door, too. Teach us to pray." And he tried. He gave them words, words which have come down to us as the Lord's Prayer, the prayer of Jesus. Words which are engraved on the memories of most Christians. But he went on. He told them to persist: "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who seeks finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." The door will be opened.

The secret inner door appeals to something deep in our spirits; it shows up in some of our favorite books: it's the ordinary wardrobe that opens into the world of Narnia. Or, in Harry Potter, the Room of Requirement: the room that always intuitively knows exactly what is required, and provides it, if the seeker concentrates while walking three times in front of the place where the door will appear. Ask and it will be given to you.



The concealed interior represents a place of safety in real life, too: the annex that hid Anne Frank and her family from the Nazis; the hiding place that Corrie Ten Boom's family constructed for Jews during the same perilous time. But Anne and her family were betrayed and sent to the concentration camps; so were the Ten Booms and those they helped and hid. The willingness of

Christians like Corrie and her sister to risk - and *lose* - their own lives for the sake of others witnesses to the power of faith. Their sacrifice echoes in a small way the immense gift of God in Christ. Their stories inspire us to ask: what would I do in the same situation? Who would I be? What *seems* like superhuman courage *is*, in fact, superhuman



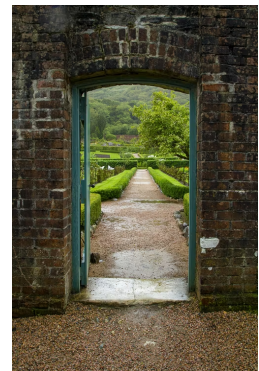
– beyond us, without divine aid. Eva Hermann and her husband were German Quakers in the Second World War. They, too, were imprisoned by the Nazis for years, in horrible harsh conditions, before they were freed at the war’s end, only to face the grim reality of a destroyed and impoverished nation. But during those prison years, Eva discovered another kind of inner door, “a door to God’s eternal love, a door through which she could enter, a love in which she could abide, no matter what the outward circumstances.”¹ Prayer.



Prayer is not a hiding place, but an abiding place. A place to be wrapped and held in safety, forgiven and freed from the haunting memories of past failure, or the pressing demands of an unknown future. Have you thought about that word, abide? A friend of mine wrote recently about how it implies the very opposite of striving, working hard, or competing. No one says, “Oh, I was abiding *so hard!*” or, “I’m abiding better than you.” Abiding means, once you’re in, you’re in. There’s no sense working at it. You *can’t* work at it. You simply abide. In that place, love is all that can be known, because love is all there is. Thomas Kelly, an American, was deeply influenced by his time in pre-WWII Germany. He witnessed the build-up to the war. He considered the overcrowded, overly busy lives of Americans - yes, even then, a full 80 years ago - a time we tend to think of as a slower, easier time. It wasn’t. And he wrote, “We have hints that there is a way of life vastly richer and deeper than all of this hurried existence, a life of unhurried peace and serenity and power. If only we could slip over into that Center!”²

Prayer is the way: an inner door always available to us. Jesus taught it; but even though his disciples heard the words, they slipped out of the Center again, just as we do. Pretty soon they were galloping down the road of questioning, criticizing, complaining, quarreling again.

The inner door opens into the Center, a place to abide in God’s love. This is love in an eternal sense, but love in a practical way, too. Love as in getting warm bread instead of cold stones for dinner. Love as in someone opening the door from a dingy space into the breathtaking interior, a room that’s more spacious, more light-filled, more homelike than the house that holds it. Love as in someone opening the door when you show up exhausted, and hurt in your body and your soul, and that someone says, “Welcome home.” Welcome home. And when you walk in, you understand that the inside is bigger than the outside. And you realize, I’ve lived with this door all my life, and I never knew or noticed. Or maybe you did know once, long ago, but you forgot. Knock again. The door will open for you. That’s prayer, the inner door that will always open when you need it, to the place that holds everything you need. For breath prayer, we pray: Welcome/home. Welcome/home.



¹ Marcelle Martin, *Our Life Is Love*, (Inner Light Books, 2016), pp. 157-159.

² Thomas Kelly, “The Simplification of Life,” in *A Testament of Devotion* (Harper, 1969),

Prayers

Life is complicated; you know that, tender One. You give us a way out that is a way in: through the inner door, into your peace and calm. Give us eyes to see that door; give us the longing to slip through it into the center of your love, and abide there.

We yearn for so many things: peace on this earth, a good harvest, an end to poverty, a better life for people fleeing their homes because of conflict; an abiding place for people who have no homes to flee from. A cure for wildfires running rampant through our forests and fertile lands, and for viruses tearing through whole populations of people. Your people are harassed and helpless, not knowing where to turn. Help us turn to you.

We return to your loving care those you have given us to love and care for: all who travel today; all who mourn; all who are recovering from surgery; and all who have covid or are recovering from it; all who are lonely, confusing, or despairing; all on hospice, who face that final journey to your heart of hearts. May all have loving hands to help and loving faces to shine on them through those days.

Gracious God, daily you give us our bread. You give us the Realm. You call us into community with all the world. For this we thank you. In gratitude we give you our lives, Send us into the world to share your love, to do your will, to forgive as we have been forgiven, that your Reign of Grace may prevail upon earth. Bless us that we may bear fruit in your Realm, in the name of Christ, by the power of your Holy Spirit.

And we pray in Jesus' name, Beloved, Center and Source of our living,
whose presence is heaven, your holy love fills Creation.

May your delight be fulfilled and your Realm unfold among us,
the visible world blossoming out of the unseen.

We turn to you alone for our sustenance, the bread of life each day.

Set us free from our failings, as we set free all who have failed us.

Lead us beyond our desires and save us from the grip of evil.

For the world is within you; all power is from you,

and all glory is about you in eternity, which is the present moment. Amen.

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