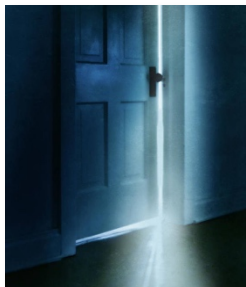


“Leaving the Door Ajar”

Rev. David Gregory

February 13, 2022

6th Sunday after Epiphany



Light Coming From a Door Ajar
Jill Battaglia

Readings

Luke 6:17-21

from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson

Coming down off the mountain with them, he stood on a plain surrounded by disciples, and was soon joined by a huge congregation from all over Judea and Jerusalem, even from the seaside towns of Tyre and Sidon. They had come both to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. Those disturbed by evil spirits were healed. Everyone was trying to touch him—so much energy surging from him, so many people healed! Then he spoke:

You're blessed when you've lost it all.

God's realm is there for the finding.

You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry.

Then you're ready for the Messianic meal.

You're blessed when the tears flow freely.

Joy comes with the morning.

“Keeping Faith”

a poem by Lynn Ungar from her book *These Days*

It's hard, these days to know what to believe in.
I still pray to Goodness, Truth and Mercy,
but I am starting to suspect there are stronger gods,
and war brewing on the mountain.
Hope is still in the pantheon, but Optimism
slunk off a while back. Joy, and her sister Delight,
still come around, and I leave the door open as I can.
But sometimes it's hard for the soul to keep faith.
I am trying to listen behind its high, anxious whine
to prayers of the flesh. “Tea,” says the body.
“Rain, lavender, red leaves, pie.”



Tea painting
Elena Sanina

For several years prior to our arrival in this place, there were a couple of times each year, usually in the spring and fall, that I worked as a spiritual director in the Holy Cross Monastery during their spiritually directed retreats. Holy Cross is an Episcopal gathering of Benedictine brothers who offer radical hospitality and contemplative programming in a beautiful setting across the Hudson River from Hyde Park. Participants in the directed retreats were assigned a spiritual director with whom they would meet daily for forty-five minutes, and except for those sessions, the house remained in silence. As a director I was assigned three or four people to work with during the retreat, and the conversations were some of the deepest in my experience, partly because the people hadn't spoken in twenty-four hours, and neither had I. In most of that time we weren't really making eye contact with anyone.

There were always some folks who were more comfortable in silence than others, and I remember one person in particular who exhibited signs of being highly uncomfortable. She was like many others who were attracted to an escape from Manhattan, curious about silence, and looking forward to the beautiful surroundings. She was a busy executive in an important position, invited by a friend who thought she needed it (and she probably did), but the shift was perhaps a bit more than she bargained for. After the first night she confessed that she had never really meditated, and had never considered it something she had much interest in doing. The first day she was crawling the walls. On the second day there was a slight breakthrough, and on the third day she was fully relaxed. I call it the Big Apple Withdrawal. She expressed a concern that while she eventually enjoyed the retreat, she didn't think she could find a place of quiet at home, even though she lived alone. I asked her if she thought she could be quiet for ten minutes and she didn't think so. How about five minutes? She doubted it. How about two? Maybe. I invited her to start with two minutes, and think of it as opening a window. Once that window was opened, it could be opened a teeny bit wider, and then a little more and a little more. Some weeks later she contacted me to say that she was meditating fifteen minutes a day and loving it. There are times when all it takes is the slightest opening to let a little oxygen in, and soon we're delighted with new air.

I've returned to the work of Lynn Ungar this week. She's the poet and Unitarian minister whose pandemic era book *These Days* has spoken so deeply to many of us.

It's hard, these days to know what to believe in.
I still pray to Goodness, Truth and Mercy,
but I am starting to suspect there are stronger gods,
and war brewing on the mountain.
Hope is still in the pantheon, but Optimism
slunk off a while back. Joy, and her sister Delight,
still come around, and I leave the door open as I can....

I leave the door open as I can. This is the phrase that captured me and reminded me of that spiritual director back in New York who couldn't find it within herself to jump in fully, but who did find she could leave a window open. It's really all about the windows and doors in our lives, the places where we might find ourselves closed in or shut off. Maybe we're afraid of what's out there, or perhaps there's an impulse of self-protection (something we've probably all felt in the last couple of years). Over these past two years, we've grown accustomed to staying in. What started as solitude may have become isolation, and as a result we've lost some of the energy of community. So what now? How do we reconnect? Maybe it's not about diving in head first. Maybe it has to do with leaving the door slightly ajar. Whether reconnecting with Divine Silence in meditation or finding our way back to communal worship, or traveling to see our families, it need not all happen at once. You can start with tea, perhaps, or lavender, or pie, and see where it goes from there.

On some level, we're all in the place Lynn Ungar describes. It is indeed hard to know what to believe in. It's easy to give in to cynicism or even despair, to close the door on joy or optimism. Life may not always be about the next big, wonderful thing. Perhaps we can't throw the door open wide for whatever is out there to come waltzing in. But we can open it slightly and perhaps peer across the threshold. Living on that threshold might be just enough to help us understand the words of Jesus when he says that we're blessed when we've lost it all, or when we're ravenously hungry, or when our tears are flowing freely. Living on the threshold keeps us just a step away from the "Joy that comes with the morning." All we need is a tiny bit of openness, and the light will penetrate the cracks, and begin to warm us to a brand new day. Maybe today we can at least come to the threshold and wait.

There's another poem you may remember from our Advent Reader a couple of years ago. It was shared by Sylvia Victor from a poet named Gunilla Norris who at one time shared her work here at CCC. A friend brought it back to my attention a couple of days ago. It's entitled, "Crossing the Threshold," and I think it dovetails nicely with today's reading.

Many times today I will cross over a threshold.
I hope I will catch a few of those times.
I need to remember that my life is, in fact,
a continuous series of thresholds.
from one moment to the next,
from one thought to the next,
from one action to the next.

Help me appreciate how awesome this is.
How many are the chances to be really alive...
to be aware of the enormous dimension
we live within.

On the threshold the entire past
and the endless future
rush to meet one another.

They take hold of each other and laugh.
They are so happy to discover themselves
in the awareness of a human creature.
On the threshold the present breaks all boundaries.
It is convergence,
a fellowship with all time and space.
We find You there.
and we are found by You there.

Help me cross into the present moment –
into wonder, into Your grace;
that "now-place," where we all are,
unfolding as Your life moment by moment.

Let me live on the threshold as threshold.