

**Christ Presbyterian Church**

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**Imagine Church: Spirit of Possibility | Revelation 3:7-8**

Well, good morning, everybody. I have been looking forward to this so much! John Crosby has become a good friend and partner in so many ways over the years. “Hi” from the church where I am in Menlo. I have enjoyed getting to know Laura and the family, and I have heard about you for such a long time, so I’ve been looking forward so much to leaving California and coming to Minnesota in January. Thanks so much for making it this weekend in particular that I get to come. That’s really kind.

I love that vision. I love to be with a church where you’re thinking, “God, what do You have for us next?” I just hope in this moment that all of you will be open. I think God’s got something to say, and there may be some people here where God will use, (my) very inadequate words, in these next moments, to change your life, and to tap you on the shoulder. God does that, and you never know when or how it will happen. I love that about God. I love that about the spirit of God, the mystery and the surprise.

I’m going to read two different texts to get us into this. One is from the Book of Revelation; it’s the third chapter, seventh and eighth verses where the text says,

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens, no one can shut. And what he shuts, no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I’ve placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.” [Revelation 3:7-8]

I used to have these wonderful devotionals by a teacher that John and I both had at Wheaton College, at different times, who had a big impact on our lives. His name is Gerry Hawthorne. He would talk about this passage. What a rich image “door” is. It sometimes means safety, “To bolt a door.” Sometimes rejection, “She slammed the door in my face.” Sometimes privacy and rest. They did a survey a while ago about “What’s your favorite room in your home?” And for most husbands, it was the kitchen. Anybody wants to guess what, for most wives with young children, her favorite room was? It’s the bathroom, because she can run in there and lock the door so those little brats can’t get at her!

I just read this yesterday; this is from Lee Strobel. I think Erma Bombeck said it originally, “When my children get unruly, I use a playpen. I come out of it when they settle down.” Which I felt was kind of funny. Anyway, Gerry Hawthorne would say the door in this passage means none of those things. Rather, it is an open door that is symbolic of boundless opportunities and unlimited chances to do something worthwhile.

Of grand openings to new and unknown adventures of significant living. Of heretofore unimagined chances to do good to make our lives count for eternity. God says, "I've set before you an open door." That means it's opened by God. He's done it and it's open right now.

And then there's a second text from a different author. A lot of times at graduation, people are looking for a gift to give graduates and books are a popular choice. This one is given to people that graduate from kindergarten, and sometimes to people that graduate from doctorate programs, same book. I'll read a little bit of it. See if you can guess the author.

"Congratulations, today is your day. You're off to great places. You're off and away. You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. Oh, the places you'll go. You'll be on the way up. You'll be seeing great sights. You'll join the high flyers who soar the high heights. Except when you don't. Because, sometimes, you won't. All alone whether you like it or not. All alone is something you'll be quite a lot. But when things start to happen, don't worry. Don't stew. Just go right along. You'll be happening too. Kid, you'll move mountains! So, be your name Buxbaum, or Bixby, or Bray, or Mordecai, Ali Van Allen O'Shea, you're off to great places. Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting so get on your way!"

Anybody know who the author of that is? Dr. Seuss. A little embarrassing, I have to tell you, I actually like Dr. Seuss quite a lot. The only problem is when I read Dr. Seuss, I start to talk like Dr. Seuss. And in my line of work that's not a real good thing.

But I want to talk to you about the open door and the places you'll go and ask you to think about, *God, are you calling me? God, what are you saying to me? What are you saying to our church?* I want to do that by offering some observations about the open door and then inviting you to be an open door person.

The first observation is kind of a conviction, and it's something about God that I love. Our God is a God of the open door. Our God loves to present opportunities, challenges, mysteries, surprise, and possibilities to the human race. That tells us something about God, and it tells us about our lives. Open doors will come to me not because of my giftedness, or my boldness, or my strength, or my networks...they're gifts of grace. They come to anybody out of the blue, by surprise from God, and it's always been this way.

In the very beginning, God comes to a man named Abraham, a nomad, a nothing, doesn't know anything. Out of the blue, God says to him, "Congratulations, today is your day. You're off to great places. You're off and away." Abraham says, "Where are these places You want me to go? When will I get there? How will I know? Will I need a design? Will I need a degree? Will I need other things that You're hiding from me? What is the map of Your plan for my life? I must know all this stuff. I must talk to my wife!" And lo, the Lord did not tell him. The Lord is very fuzzy on details about open doors. God says, "No, that would take all the fun, and adventure, and mystery, and surprise out of it."

His first command to Abraham is real simple. There's a key word for you, "Go, just go." That's the first command. Where? "To the place I will show you." That's a little vague. "Go means you're going to have to trust me. Go means you're going to have to leave your illusion of being in control of your own life. Because my project, Abraham, which by the way, begins with you, involves that whole world. I'm concerned about all of humanity. And so, you got to go." And then, although God doesn't tell Abraham where, He tells him why He wants him to go. It's summed up in a single word, "Bless."

Now, this is my second conviction about doors. An open door is never primarily about just me. God says to Abraham, "I will bless you, but that blessing is not for you to keep in, it's for you to give out. It's not about your status, your ego, your fulfillment." Just real simple. Kind of his message to Abraham initially is just, "Go." That is—trust the open door. And then your job is just, "Bless." Real simple word. Will the good for other people. Enhance their life. Real simple. But God is going to use this on a scale you can't imagine. He says to Abraham, "I will bless you and all the nations or all the people groups, all the races, all the ethnic groups." On Martin Luther King Weekend we remember how much brokenness and how much racism has just destroyed this world God loves, this country God loves, this community that God loves. And over and over through Genesis, God makes this promise to Abraham. It's very striking, especially when you think about the Middle East and Israel and the nations around it today. God says, "All peoples on Earth, all."

I grew up in a Baptist church in Rockford, Illinois. We used to sing this song, "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Remember that? All the children of the world, red, yellow, black and white, they were precious. In Rockford, where I grew up, all the little black children lived on the west side of Rock River and the white children lived on the east side of Rock River, and we didn't talk about that much in the church where I grew up. See, there's a mission statement for Abraham and Israel. "Your call, your mission, is to go and bless." And to bless is to add life. See, blessing is what God does.

The first time we see the word "bless" in the Bible, it doesn't even involve human beings, kind of cool. This is from Genesis 1. We're told God created the great creatures of the sea. Where I live in California, you can see them on a regular basis. You can't here because now they would be like this because everything is frozen here. Just get used to it John. Anyway, I digress.

"God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems and God blessed them. God said, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas.'" [Genesis 1:21-22]

I love the picture of God blessing fish. How many fish did God make? Many fish, one fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish, not one of them is like another. I don't know why. Go ask your mother. He makes so many things, I guess, so he could have some things to bless because that's what God intends, it's His project. That's the *Missio Dei*, the project, the mission of God, it's that simple, to bless.

And then He creates human beings in His own image and God blessed them.

“Prosper. Reproduce. Fill the Earth. Take charge. Exercise dominion. Be responsible. Care for the fish in the sea and birds in the air. For every living thing that moves on the face of the Earth.” [Genesis 1:28]

God makes human beings and then He says, “See, I set before you an open door. Unlimited opportunities of doing good.” God blesses the human beings and tells them they are to be a blessing to the Earth. An open door life is a life with a mission. Whose mission is it? It’s God’s mission. What’s the mission? Bless, it’s that simple. Where? Wherever you go. When? Congratulations, today is your day! And people will say, “But I don’t know what to do. But I have not been trained. But I do not know how. But I’m not articulate about my faith. But I get timid with other people.” It is as simple as Dr. Seuss. Go bless.

Leads to a third observation: open doors start *where* you are and *when* you are. And if you do not go through one today, you’re not likely to do it tomorrow. They start where you are, not where you think you ought to be, or where you used to be.

There’s a front page article of the *San Francisco Chronicle* in the area where I live about a metro transit operator named Linda Wilson-Allen. She drives a bus. And there’s a front page article about her because she loves the people on her bus. It’s real simple, but real striking. And the world gets amazed anytime someone does something with love and joy that blesses other people. So this is what Linda does. She knows the regulars on her bus. She knows them by name. If they’re late, she will actually stop and wait for them and then make up the time on her route. A woman in her eighties named Elsie was struggling with some groceries and she needed to take the bus. Linda stopped the bus, got out of her driver seat, went out and carried the groceries onto the bus. Today, Elsie lets other busses pass her by at the bus stop and she waits so she can ride with Linda on her bus. Linda saw a woman named Tanya in a shelter. Tanya looked a little lost and it was almost Thanksgiving, so Linda stopped the bus, leaned out and yelled, “Hey, are you all by yourself? It’s almost Thanksgiving. Why don’t you come over to my place and kick it with me and the kids.” And now she and Tanya are friends. The reporter who wrote this article rides on Linda’s bus—this is a bus driver—rides on her bus every day. He said, “She has built such a community on her bus that passengers offer Linda the use of their vacation homes for free. They bring her potted plants and floral bouquets. When people found out that Linda likes to wear scarves to accessorize her uniform, they started giving her scarves as presents. One passenger upgraded her gift to a rabbit fur collar.” The article says she may be the most beloved bus driver since Ralph Kramden of *The Honeymooners*. Anybody remember Ralph Kramden?

And you think about what an unglamorous, non-prestigious, thankless job it is to drive a bus for crying out loud—not much money, traffic jams, cranky passengers, engines that break down, gum on the seats, spills on the floor—how does she do it with an attitude

like this? I'll tell you how, it's in the article. *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Her mood is always set at 2:30AM when she gets down on her knees"— 2:30AM, this is a real person—"to pray for thirty minutes. 'There is always a lot to talk about with the Lord', said Wilson-Allen, a member of Glad Tidings Church in Hayward." A bus driver. "When she gets to the end of her line she will always say, 'That's all. I love you. Take care.'"

I was so fired up when I read that article about this praying woman who drives a bus in Jesus' name that I invited her to our church. I live in Silicon Valley. A lot of people go out there because they want to climb the ladder of achievements, big deals, money. And so, I brought her out and we just talked about how do you do work in Jesus' name? She drives a bus in Jesus' name. I tell you guys, she was a rock star. I'm not kidding you. After the 11:00AM service, people stood in line literally for an hour to shake her hand or to have her pray for them. A bus driver. And when she was talking about our church, she would just say, "Jesus and I just love the people on my bus. Amen?" And nobody said anything back, kind of like this church here, because it's a Presbyterian church, so I had to explain . . . *Linda's from the kind of church where, if she says Amen, you have to say Amen back to her.* And so then everybody would say Amen, and for the rest of that service, people kept saying Amen. She writes us back periodically, we stay in touch, and she said, "Now don't let your church forget the power of the Amen. Don't let the church go back to the way it used to be." Amen?

So, people will wonder, where can I find the kingdom of God? Where is the kingdom of God? I will tell you where. It's on the Number 45 bus in San Francisco. People wonder, where can I find an open door? Where's some glorious, glamorous, organization lead, faraway place to go? I'll tell you where you can find it . . . behind the wheel of a bus in the Bay area. Oh, the places you'll go.

Another observation: open doors are about opportunities, they're not about guarantees. People obsess over which door should I take...door 1 or door 2? When I was finishing school, I was trying to figure out which direction I should go with my life. What vocation avenue should I go down? I was kind of a church kid, so you're supposed to pray and then God's supposed to tell you, especially if you're thinking about becoming a pastor, which I was. So I prayed for hours, for a long time, and I would get so frustrated because God didn't give me an answer. I didn't get any kind of response. It took me years to learn about this because I felt like, if God doesn't tell me which door to go through, then either I'm praying wrong or God's not keeping up with what God's supposed to do. And this is what it took me a long time to learn—and this is critical about guidance and the will of God and decision making—God is more concerned with the person I become than the circumstances I inhabit.

Now, I'm all for circumstances, but God's more concerned with the person I become, and this is critical because it means that God's primary goal for me in my life is that I grow into excellence in personhood—that I become a person of good judgment and good character who makes really good decisions—and the only way that I can grow in that is if I actually make decisions rather than getting told what to do all the time. And

you'll recognize this if you're a parent. You know, would you want it to be the case with your kids that all the time they just do what you tell them? You tell them to wear these clothes, eat this food, take this class, go to this school, date this person, marry this person, take this job, live in this area...would you want your kid to always do what you say all the time? No would be the correct answer! Because parents understand that decision making is an indispensable part of character formation. Decision making is an indispensable part of character formation, and God is in the character formation business. And what that means is, very often when you face a decision about God's will for your life, the answer will be *you choose*. Not take door 1 or door 2, but you choose, because you will grow more if you choose than if you just get told what to do. And the reality for me was, I didn't want so much God's will as I wanted to be spared the anxiety of making a big decision. I wanted to be guaranteed success. And a lot of times in the church, we just get kind of goofy about God's will for my life because reality is, it's a heavy burden on a human being to make a decision, and we'd rather offload and outsource it. And a lot of times God may not tell you exactly what to do. Now, if God has a task for you or something for you to do, He's perfectly capable of guiding your thoughts through prayer, or through Scripture, or through another person, or through a conversation. God can and does do that I believe, but very often God's will for your life is, *I want you to choose*, so I can't presume that God's supposed to tell me what to do as a way of sparing me the anxiety of having to take responsibility for a big choice. That's one of the reasons why the Bible doesn't say read tea leaves or pursue some kind of a message from the beyond, it says pursue wisdom. The Bible says so much about wisdom. "If anybody lacks wisdom let them ask of God" it says in James, "who gives to everybody generously without making them feel guilty."

This teacher of mine, Gerry Hawthorne, said to me when I was thinking about going on to school, "If you get into Fuller, I think you should take that as God's open door in your life", and so I went there and I got a degree in clinical psychology, but also a Masters of Divinity. I couldn't figure out what to do in my life, so I started doing therapy, and I found out that I was a really bad therapist. People would come and see me and get less healthy over time as they saw me, and I hated doing it. And then, I started preaching and I felt really alive and I loved doing it and I thought, *well, this must be God's calling on my life*, and then it got really hard.

I was preaching one time at First Baptist Church, the first church that I worked with my old boss, John Anderson, and I was about five minutes into the sermon. It wasn't going well and the next thing I knew, I had fainted dead away. And there was a lot going on in my life. I was about to spend a year overseas, I was about to get married, and take finals, and so I thought *well, there's just a lot going on*. I came back a year later, same church, same job, the very next time I got up to preach, five minutes in, I fainted dead away. And the worst part was, this was a Baptist church; it wasn't a charismatic church where you get credit for doing that kind of thing. By that time, I felt like I was called to preach, but you can't preach if you faint on a regular basis. Makes people nervous.

That was over 30 years ago now, and I got an email from the guy who is now the pastor at that church a while ago because they were going to be celebrating their 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and he said, “We still remember you.” They wondered if I would come back and preach...and the likelihood of me fainting again... so, I went back and spoke, but I didn’t faint, and I’m feeling okay now, so you don’t have to look so nervous.

But here’s the thing when it comes to open doors. They are about opportunities, and not guaranteed. Discerning God’s will doesn’t mean you get a free pass from never failing. And very often, who you become while you’re going through a door matters more than which door you go through. And very often we’ll go through a door, but then we think *man, what about that opportunity? What if I had done that? What if I had gone there?* We spend all kinds of energy thinking about “what ifs” and we don’t throw ourselves with our whole heart into the door that we actually go through. Very often *how* you go through a door matters more than which door you go through.

Next observation: going through an open door does not mean life will be easier on the other side. Think about this question. When in the Bible does God ever give somebody an easy job? When does God ever interrupt someone’s life and say *I have an assignment for you, but it won’t take much time, and it won’t be very difficult, and it won’t really interrupt your busy agenda?* Never! There are no stories in the Bible like that. God never says, *I promise if you go it will be easy.* God says, *I promise if you go I’ll go with you.* Oh, the places you’ll go. God comes to a man named Noah...He says, “I want you to leave everything that is familiar to you, I want you to face judgement, and ridicule, and desolation, and enormous difficulty, but I will go with you and I’ll give you a sign—a rainbow!” And Noah says, “I’ll go.” God comes to a man named Abraham and says, “I want you to leave your home, and your culture, and your family, and your people, and everything familiar. Go to a place you don’t even know, I’ll tell you when you get there, but I will go with you and I will give you a sign—circumcision.” Abraham says, “Noah got the rainbow. Couldn’t it be like a secret handshake or a code?”

Again, I grew up in the church, so I kind of know how this goes. In churches, people will sometimes actually refuse to go through doors based on this criteria: *I just don’t feel peace about it. Nah, I don’t think God’s calling me to do that because I just don’t feel peace about it.* Where in the world in the Bible did God ever tell Moses, I want you to face Pharaoh—most powerful man in the world—or David up against Goliath, or Daniel against some lions, or Elijah to Jezebel, or Esther to Haman, and have one of them say, “Yes, I feel peace about that”? They never do! Peace lies always on the other side of the adventure, on the other side of the obedience, not on this side. Peace doesn’t lie in getting God to give me other circumstances, it lies in finding God in these circumstances right here. And by the way for anybody here, if you’ve ever gone through an open door and life is hard right now, it’s challenging and difficult relationally, emotionally, or spiritually, or financially, just know that you’re not the first person in the history of the kingdom to have a hard assignment and your story is not done, yet.

Next observation with open doors: the best way to discern large open doors, big decisions in life, is to practice a lot with small ones. Practice a lot with small ones because if I really am concerned about God's will for my life and there's not just the desire to offload the anxiety of big decisions, and it's not just a desire for guaranteed success, if I'm *really* concerned about that, it starts with every moment in my life. We tend to romanticize these big decisions, but following Jesus mostly involves doing what He actually said to do from one moment to the next. And every moment comes with a door. So, what's the door in this moment? What did Jesus say to do?

I got a phone call not long ago from a neighbor—a really, really cranky neighbor—and she left a message. It was just lots of complaints. Very petty. Very small-minded. Very just . . . nasty. And I was getting angry in my spirit thinking, how can I communicate nastiness back? And then I remember Jesus said, “Love your neighbor”, and I thought, Jesus, if you want this woman to receive patience and love, I will have Nancy call her.

I talked to a guy at a restaurant, he's on the wait staff, and he's working two minimum wage jobs full-time to make ends meet and to care for his mom, and I hadn't planned on doing anything. Then I remember Jesus said, “Don't lay up for yourself treasure on earth where thieves break in and steal and moth and rust corrupts, but lay up treasures in heaven”, and I thought, I can do a little heavenward investing, and I was so glad.

I was driving in traffic in the Bay Area—it's just crazy—and I was driving on the 280 expressway and I'm in a hurry and it's bumper-to-bumper and everybody's mad and frustrated. This guy drives past everybody on the left-hand shoulder of the 280 as if the road really *does* belong to him, and then he wants to get in front of me to get off at the next exit, and to make things worse he's driving a Maserati. And he looks at me and he taps his watch like um, you know, costing him time. And then I remember Jesus' words, “Get thee behind me, Satan.” There's always something, there's always something.

So, what's the door in this moment for you? Doesn't have to be big, doesn't have to be dramatic . . . to listen to somebody, to be faithful with my finances, to give encouragement, to be bold enough to confront, to remember that God is right here and every moment comes with a door and the way we learn to discern big doors is to practice over and over again on little ones. Jesus taught about life all the time.

And then, next observation: if I'm going to live an open door life—people get really messed up on this one—I must reject the myth that says if I ever chose the wrong door I'm stuck with God's Plan B for the rest of my life. And I know so many folks, especially if they experience failure they think, well, I guessed wrong. I guessed the wrong door. And what they don't know is that the whole idea of God is that He is the God of redemption and He redeems whatever we give to Him.

There's a pastor, Craig Groeschel, and he has a saying that I love. “If you're not dead, you're not done.” Just real quick, turn to the person next to you and say to them, “If

you're not dead, you're not done." It's a funny thing as we get older . . . I have friends that I went to college with and we get together every year for almost a week and we always do something a little different. One year I took them all surfing, and so we're in Santa Cruz and we had these two surf instructors from the surf school. We were on the beach with our boards and it was one of those moments—I think of us, because we all went to college together, as still being relatively young adults—until I heard one surf instructor literally say to the other one, "I guess it's AARP day at the beach today." Yeah, I guess it's not big tip day at the beach today, is it?

But it's a very interesting thing about life. Folks that study what's called the psychology of regret say there's a shift in the pattern of regrets over the course of a human life. When we're young, we usually regret dumb stuff we did. Wish I hadn't eaten that, wish I hadn't gone there, wish I hadn't drank that, wish I hadn't asked her out. Usually we regret the stuff we did. As you get older, you regret the things you didn't do. Wish I had gone there, wish I had said that, wish I'd have risked this, wish I'd given that gift.

You know, Moses is 80-years-old when God calls him to lead Israel out of Egypt. If you're not dead, you're not done. There's a woman at our church, Florence Detler, who decided a couple of years ago she needed a new challenge, so she went on Facebook. She was 101 years old. Florence is just a fabulous person. Prays for our church. Stands at her post and prays. Turns out, out of one billion people or so that were on Facebook at the time, Florence was the oldest. When Mark Zuckerberg found out—Florence isn't far from Facebook—he actually invited her to Facebook. She got to meet Mark Zuckerberg, have her picture taken with him and Sheryl Sandberg, and they did television interviews with her. And after the first interview was on TV, the next day seven thousand people from around the world asked Florence to be their friend. She was getting Carpel Tunnel Syndrome from responding to friendship requests on Facebook at the age of 101. If you're not dead, you're not done!

And we all think...

Abraham: *I'm too old*

Timothy: *I'm too young*

Esther: *I'm the wrong gender*

Moses: *I'm the wrong gifts*

Maybe the ultimate example—because if I'm going to be an open door person, I will have to face up to my resistance to open doors. I'll have to face up to what it is inside me that says, *Nope, not going to go there*—the ultimate example in the Bible, the patron saint of resistance to the open door, I think, is a guy by the name of Jonah. Anyone remember Jonah in the Bible? God: *Jonah, I've set before you an open door. Could you, would you go to preach, could you, would you go to reach the people of Assyria, for you fit my criteria?* And Jonah says to the Lord: *I would not go there in a boat, I would not go there in a float, I would not go there in a gale, I would not go there in a whale. I do not like the people there. If they all died I would not care. I will not go to that*

*great town, I'd rather choke, I'd rather drown. I will not go by land or sea, so stop this talk and let me be. Okay?* That's the story of Jonah.

And there's a guy, Abraham Maslow, he actually wrote about what he called the Jonah Complex, this strange tendency we have to evade our destiny. To run from our calling. And God is so persistent. God just keeps after Jonah, and at the end of the book we don't know how Jonah's going to decide, because it's really not about Jonah, it's really about the reader; it's really about you.

What are you going to do? *See, I've set before you an open door.* So how about you? Maybe you're facing graduation day. You have your whole life in front of you and God says, "I could use you in such ways." Will you say, "God, I'm wide open. My life's work is not going to be mostly about money. It's not mostly going to be about success or about me. God, give me an open door." Or maybe you're in a transition mode. Maybe the kids have left the house and you have more time than you've had in decades. It can be so easy to settle into, you know, a pleasant lifestyle—vacation, more money...No, no, no. It's like, "God, would You give me an open door?" Or maybe you're kind of in a rut. Maybe you used to be an open door person and things have kind of settled down and you're just in a routine and you don't know what it would be, but you just say, "God, would You give me an open door?" Maybe you're facing retirement—that's a word that's not even in the Bible—and you know you're not ready for death or shuffleboard. What might God have next for you?

See, your life is not primarily about safety, or security, or manageability, or pleasantness. The secret of life is the secret of the open door. The unheard, unseen, unnoticed, overlooked, God-prompted, God-powered, God-opened door.

And if our old friend Gerry Hawthorne were here, he would point that bony little finger at you, whether you're young or old, and he would tell you your life doesn't have to be about you, and that there lie before you unlimited possibilities of doing good. And I think about how he inspired me, and so many of us, to try to do that with our lives, and I know that God might do that with you, for that's what Jesus did.

Jesus became a real person like us, but He made His life an adventure in unlimited opportunities to do good...to touch a leper, and have fellowship with a prostitute, and welcome tax collectors that nobody else had welcomed, and bless little children, and teach and heal, and challenge. And they got offended at it and they killed Him for it, and they laid His body in the tomb, but on the third day, the Father rolled away the stone and said to His son, "See, I have set before You an open door." And ever since that day, the fellowship of the open door has been unstoppable. And what if God were to call CPC to become the fellowship of the open door? Because, see, we're open door people. We're resurrection people, that's what the church is. And the door that closed us in on ourselves, the door of sin, death, guilt, has been opened wide and Jesus has commissioned His church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against that. See, I set before you an open door.

I love the account of the resurrection in Matthew. Jesus is raised from the dead and Matthew tells us when the women go to the tomb and they find out Jesus isn't there and they hear, "Why are you seeking the living among the dead?" And the women hurried away from the tomb afraid, yet filled with joy. Now that's the open door life—afraid, yet filled with joy—and they ran to tell His disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," He said. And they worshipped Him. Doesn't that strike you as a little understated on Jesus's part? He's just conquered the grave, overcome death, risen again, experienced resurrection, and all He has to say to them is a single word? "Greetings!"

There is a great New Testament scholar named David Bruner and he talks about one time when it was the Children's Sermon time and the kids were asked, "Does anybody know what Jesus said after He was resurrected?" And one little girl raised her hand, "I know! 'Tada!'" As in, of course! As in, what did you expect? As in, see I have set before you an open door. And He gathered his friends together one more time, and He said to them, now in a way that had been shaped by centuries of redemptive history, and supremely by the teachings and the way of life of Jesus himself, "All authority of heaven and earth has been given to Me, so go and bless." And now you'll do that by making disciples of all nations, by teaching everybody what it is to live in the blessing, and the power, and the faith, and the love, and the favor, and the presence of God, and to become a disciple of Jesus because that's the greatest opportunity that's ever been offered to any human being. Go bless, make disciples of all nations.

Congratulations, today is your day. Yesterday somebody else had theirs and tomorrow somebody else might have theirs, today is your day. You will travel the world. You will stand before kings. You will have absolutely no money and be outrageously happy. You'll be locked up in prison and sing songs in the middle of the night. Doors will fall away and you'll stay right where you are because you want to testify to Me. You'll be beaten for your faith and count yourself honored to have suffered for the Name. So go feed the hungry, and feed the oppressed, and comfort the despairing, and care for the marginalized, and love the forgotten, and encourage the downfallen, listen to the lonely, you can do that and I'll be with you. And one day I'll come back and we'll set everything right, but in between that day and this day, Oh, the places you'll go.

So heavenly Father, I pray for that man, that woman, that young person, that old person right now whose heart is beating a little quicker because Your spirit is tugging at them. Maybe they had been living for themselves. Maybe they had been trapped by sin. Maybe they had been stuck in comfort. Sucked in by some kind of pattern; greed, anger, lust, fear, and You're saying to them, hey, come on, come on. I don't want you stuck there. I pray, God, that they'll have the courage to open their hands before You right now and say God, I want to go through that open door in full obedience to Jesus Christ who died for me. Maybe God's been tugging at you and you know there's a calling on your life to give yourself. To give of your time, of your energy, of your resources and you've been kind of doing the Jonah thing, kind of running the other way. Right now God is saying, *will you quit*

*running away? Will you be all in? Maybe you're kind of discouraged because you feel like, man, I've been trying and I haven't seen the outcomes and I haven't seen the results and I'm facing opposition, I'm feeling disappointed and God would say to you today, I'm not disappointed in you. I'm so glad and proud that you keep going through that open door the best you can. Just don't give up. Just don't quit.* Heavenly Father Your spirit is in this room. You're at work right now in the hearts and the wills of all of us sitting here. God, we think of the great ones that have gone before us. We think especially of our Savior Jesus. We think about how small and short our lives are and how great Your world is. We think about unlimited chances to do good with You and before You. Open the doors, God, just open as many doors as we're able with Your help to go through and then help us go through them. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*