

An Open Door – Part 2

Text: Rev 3.15, July 15/16, 2006

God is Bringing Something Down and Raising Something Up

The *big picture* is that God is **bringing something down** (the historic mainline denominations who have abandoned their biblical foundations) and **raising something up** (a network of biblically valued, mission driven, reformation rooted congregations and dioceses in vital union with our overseas partners) – and we are placed by God himself **in the riptides** of those dynamics to serve what He is raising up.

God Has Opened A Door

I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Rev. 3:8 (NIV)

It is not easy to walk through God's doors... History is littered with churches that balked, turned back or stumbled. There are seven churches like that in Revelation 2 & 3. Churches caught in the riptides or a hostile culture and internal dissent.

To Walk Through This Door, We Must Answer 4 Questions:

- What Kind of People Shall We Send Out Into the World?
- What Kind of Church Grows that Kind of People?
- What Kind of Leaders Serve that Kind of Church?
- What Kind of God Blesses This Kind of Mission?

What Kind of People Shall We Send Out Into the World?

“Disciples of Jesus Going Out on a Servant-Hearted, Disciple-Making Mission”

What Kind of Church Grows that Kind of People?

Jesus, standing among them, speaks (church of Laodicea) **Laodicea** was a **wealthy** city, very self-sufficient, and known for it. It became part of their DNA and they brought that attitude into their faith-walk with Christ. The city was also **dependent on water** from 6 miles away, carried by aqueduct, sourced by hot mineral springs. By the time it got to the city, it was lukewarm and bad tasting. Lots of people spit it out!

“I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!” Rev 3:15-17 (NLT)

People can get lukewarm in their faith, halfhearted, halfway, one foot in and one foot out – so can churches! A lukewarm church will never make disciple-making disciples, never walk through an open door. Because...

Lukewarm faith is spiritually dangerous. You would think – „well it s partway warm . But „partway warm has it s temptations. You think, “I go to church sometimes, I read my bible sometimes and I know lots of people who don t. I m sure that s OK w. God. I think about him sometimes, and I asked him to forgive me, and the bible says I will go to heaven if I believe in him.

And then you **settle in** there. You don t push on to a white hot faith, you settle in to being lukewarm. And then... we just go on managing our own lives however you think best, and floating downstream with this culture and we lose our saltiness and we are no longer good for anything but to be „trampled underfoot – to melt the ice on the sidewalks. Then you find the truth about „halfway faith – **you can ’t settle in there**. No one stays „half committed, half converted – like being „half pregnant. It always breaks one way or another.

So God w on ’t allow it, will never allow you to sit on the fence. And Jesus won t let the Laodiceans do it.

You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don ’t need a thing!’ And you don ’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

A stiff word! To get them off the fence. What s the alternative?

A Wholehearted Church. Passionate, white hot, fully committed, fully alive. Some marks; in a wholehearted church,

Making Disciples is more Important than Making Club Members

Making followers of Jesus is what we are all about. Q - Is that why you are here?
So I advise you to buy gold from me– gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see.

Rev 3:18 (NLT)

Gold and Garmets and healing salve – is imagery about having the things that matter most – the forgiveness of Christ to cleanse, the character of Christ growing in you, the wisdom of Christ to see.

It is easy to have a church drift away from this kind of faith and turn into a **religious club**. Concerned not for Christ and discipleship, but for our style, our facilities, our pastor, our traditions – ands that s what we talk about.

St Anne s 3rd purple candle in Advent...

You see, we don ’t go around preaching about ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus ’ sake. 2 Co 4:5 (NLT)

Making followers of Jesus is what we are all about. Q - Is that why you are here?

Christ’s Mission Values Rise Above My Preferences

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples... Mt 28:18-20

That mission matters more than anything.

Most frequent topic of **communication cards** over the past 11 years (after prayers for healing). Music. Liturgy. Worship style. (4X52=200X11=2200)

Last week I had 3 people contact me about the idea of starting a group for preg teenage moms at QV "I want in" – more cards on that issue than on music! Yea! (Applause for our music teams)

I would like to change the subject to Christ's mission. I would love to encourage you to pray and dream and think big.

Bp of Muslim land, building **Meeting Points** all over Egypt. Picture of a hospital with a chapel in the middle of it. City School w. 75 servant hearted Christians in it. That's the vision! Can we get on with the mission?

Christ's Grace Heals Our Failures

Churches are funny critters! They are founded by a perfect Savior who has a bunch of imperfect people. "Join the Vestry and lose your faith" Famous advice of a pastor to a woman who was shopping for **the perfect church**, "Madam, if you find the perfect church, by all means don't join it; you'll just ruin it!"

The truth is churches are **like families**: we get to deal with stuff along the way. The church that God uses on the other side of the open door has to **learn to deal** with sin and failure and mistakes along the way.

Lots of times we make a mistake, people get upset, commitment steps back and then faith steps back. **We fold our arms and hold back.**

Some of you have done that because of **our building programs**. We have had long, honest talks about this on our Vestry, and we are grateful for these facilities and grateful for the sacrificial giving and grateful for the long term vision that inspired them. But we think we ran ahead of the consent of this congregation and the wisdom of God as the project unfolded, and that was a mistake. We could have and should have come back to the congregation for conversation and consent. Maybe we would have ended up doing it in **two stages**. The **result** has been we have overextended our ability to support our core ministries in the process. None of us like that. Result: **some of us stepped back**. We holding back.

Today I join our Vestry and ask for forgiveness. Will you cover it with the blood of Jesus, release it to God, and move forward with us?

There are a number of other issues in the congregation that have given us reason to be halfway committed – personal history w. a staff member, personal preferences in worship, personal history on a ministry team, personal hostility towards our

denomination, etc, etc, etc. Will you cover it with the blood of Jesus, release it to God, and move forward with us?

Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Eph 4:32 (NLT)

Mistakes are part of what happens in churches. But if we are as patient (forgiving, forbearing) with others as Christ has been with us, this will be a grace place, and we will get through the door.

Christ's Kingdom Priorities Trump My Life Priorities

When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, 'Come, the banquet is ready.' But they all began making excuses. One said, 'I have just bought a field...'; 'I have just bought five pairs of oxen...'. Another said, 'I now have a wife, so I can't come.'

Luke 14:17-20 (NLT)

Did you notice that these things are all **good things**, good things that have become more important than the **greatest thing**. And when that happens, you can't get through the door into God's future.

I would like to ask you to let some things go, and think some things through, and take some things up.

Look at **Open Door Covenant...**

Congregational Briefing: Going Into the Future Together

There is a shared sense on our Vestry that the call of God and the opportunities of the future are real, exciting, and are indeed an „Open Door“ in front of us. But we also sense this door is not easily entered, and that God himself is shaping us for the work ahead as we step up to this door.

We have been through much over the last decade. Now as we stand before an open door into the future, we sense forgiveness needs to be asked and given, and wonder who will go first? We believe many distractions to his Kingdom work need to be set aside, and we wonder who will lay them down? We believe personal preferences of religious style need to be released, and we look to see who will let them go? We sense a new season of leadership empowerment just ahead and wonder, who will step up? We know the challenge of our budget constraints and we ask, who will give? We believe that God is saying to us there will be a hard future for St Stephens unless we meet these challenges. To go through the Open Door into a new season of Kingdom life and gospel mission, we must let some things go, and go through together.

We pledge to you as a leadership team that we will lead the way, giving of our lives and time and substance for the sake of Christ and his gospel with a new generosity and passion, and we ask you to come along with us.