



Glendive/Wibaux United Methodist Church
September 15, 2019

1 Timothy 1:12-17

I love doors and doorways. I love arches and arch ways, gates and entryways. Not like a typical American home, but the old and sometimes crumbling doors of Europe and in old towns. One day I'm going to use all the pictures I've taken and write a small inspirational book using doors.

Let us pray: Eternal One, your door to salvation and eternal life is always open to us. In these few minutes help us to unlock that door through the meditations of my heart and the words of my mouth. Amen.

If eyes are the windows to the soul, then doors are the portal to how we present ourselves. Aldous Huxley said, "There are things known and things unknown and in between are the doors of perceptions." We are more comfortable with our knowns behind the doors than with open doors which might bring too many changes.

Pope Francis reminds us, "Instead of being the church that welcomes and receives by just keeping the doors open, let us also try to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass or those who have quit or are indifferent." This goes for Methodists, too!

And finally, in true Wesleyan and Methodist theology, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said, "Forgiveness is a way of opening up the doors again and moving forward, whether it's a personal life or a national life." And I would add whether it's a community life or a congregational life.

(<https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/doors-quotes> September 12, 2019)

When Paul addressed the letter to Timothy, he was speaking as an older mentor, perhaps in the waning years of his ministry, to a younger and favored mentee. Paul's confession, if you will, to Timothy that he still recognizes his sins and faults from his early years and praises the grace and mercy and forgiveness God has bestowed on him. Did Paul always exhort about his past, was that his personal testimony in every speech or gathering? I don't know, but it is his story. How can one tell the story of redemption and forgiveness without acknowledging what is being forgiven and why? We may say, "God forgive me for all my sins," but sometimes we must list them, spell them out, don't hide them. We have to present them to God and sometimes, to others, in order to heal.

1 Timothy 1:16 *The Message*, Here's a word you can take to heart and depend on: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. I'm proof—Public Sinner Number One—of someone who could never have made it apart from sheer mercy. And now he shows me off—evidence of his endless patience—to those who are right on the edge of trusting him forever.

Folks, Jesus has presented us with men like Paul and Timothy and Jeremiah and Luke, to first, help us not feel like we are unique in our failings. And, second, to also give hope that we will also have mercy and forgiveness. Today's scriptural characters were each presented with a door they had to walk through. An open invitation to present themselves for God's call. Each had to overcome a sense of unworthiness yet eventually believing they were going into a much better place.

When the Holy Spirit closes one door, another opens. This is equally true for individuals as it is for churches and congregations. Pope Francis inferred; our doors must be open so we can get out. Get out to be with folks who have lost their way, for whatever reason. And in opening and going out, we must acknowledge where we have failed to let people in, or to avoid some people. Small and large communities are full of rivalries: within families and between families, within organizations and between organizations, within churches and between churches. And this doesn't even speak to the bitter divisiveness of politics in these contexts.

If we are called to present ourselves through the open doors of this building, metaphorically and literally, we may have to dig into why the doors have been closed in the first place? What has kept us from and keeps us from going through doors that can easily open a new world of hope and discipleship before us or close us off from a world we don't want to see? Do we welcome strangers and visitors or keep people with certain last names or politics or sexual orientation out.

I love the movie, *Murphy's Romance*, starring Sally Field and James Garner. It's from 1985 but bear with me. Sally Field plays Emma a single mom trying to make her way in the world. She is divorced from Bobby Jack, played by Brian Kerwin. James Garner plays, Murphy, a much older pharmacist and they take a liking to each other when she moves into his town. In their first scene together, he makes sure she knows the ways of small towns. To which she answers, "You mean keep your front room picked up. Don't sit around in your bathrobe after 10:00. Don't mess with a married man." Murphy adds, "We also have a Rhodes scholar, a homosexual, marijuana growing in with the tomatoes and a man that wears his wife's nightgown." Just like our small town, isn't it?

Siblings, God will see us in our bath robes and when our house is messy, when we're dressed for church or when we come dirty and angry and worried and skeptical. But if we close our doors to the Eternal One, we'll never be free of the darkness and discomfort that can lurk inside our homes and our souls. This may be heavy stuff, but it's important to understand that God is calling us. Not just to come into worship and fellowship every Sunday or as often as your schedules allow (I suggest he wants more of your schedules) but then to take what we learn and tell others, so they'll have what you have, outside the doors.

If these literal and metaphorical doors are never open rarely opened, will we truly be able to be the people we can be. To acknowledge that even with our many cultural successes, we can be failures at being Christians is the first step to unlocking the doors and letting a little light in. At some point in Murphy's Romance, Bobby Jack is trying to plead his case for Emma to take him back. He brags, "I'm a born-again Christian!" Her response, "Well, I sure hope they don't pass you the collection plate." Bobby ack may have gone through a door towards redemption, but he walked straight back out again. Let's us not walk out and right back in without truly answering our missional call. And certainly, let's not walk in every worship time and go out without fulfilling our unique calls.

Amen and Selah