

“Threshold Experiences”
June 6, 2021

Jeremiah 31:1-6
Matthew 7:7-14

As I said at the beginning of our worship this morning, we are in a time of transition. Some people venturing out without masks. Some are gathering in groups once more. *Some* find themselves unexpectedly *considering* getting vaccinated—even if only because the shot carries with it a chance at a million dollars or a six pack of beer.

There is much joy among many. And because it is a time of transition there is also much uneasiness and hesitancy and ambiguity.

We find ourselves at a threshold—the door is open. We are only beginning to discover and to give shape to the new world that is out there. Will we simply return to the before times? Will we simply create something altogether different?

The scriptures connect us with other people at other times who went through threshold experiences:

The prophet Jeremiah speaks the good news of return from exile, of restoration of the city and its people. Once again they will take up their tambourines and dance—they will go from the countryside into Jerusalem, the city of God.

Jesus talks of wide gates and narrow gates—both open, both offering a path—and he urges his followers to go through the gate that leads to life.

And the psalmist encourages us with the affirmation that God will keep our going out and our coming in—not just in this present time but forevermore.

We find ourselves in threshold—the door is open. And while it might seem at first that we simply need to go through and go forward, a threshold actually demands more from us even as it offers more to us.

So let us pause this morning. Let us take a few minutes to begin to consider where we are and where we are going.

I don’t have a lot to *tell* you this morning. I do have some questions.

Instead, I invite you to relax, to sit back, and with these questions perhaps create your own sermon.

Think back over the past year. Yes, there is probably much that we would want to forget and leave behind.

But what are the insights and perspectives that you have had that are precious, that you want to bring with you into the days ahead?

Remembering the challenges of a difficult past, Jeremiah says: “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared...”

So, again, think back over the past year.

What is the spiritual life that you developed? What did you discover about your own spiritual life?

Was there anything different in how you prayed? In how you connected with others? With God?

How did you—in your own isolation—develop a relationship to this congregation? Or to the larger community?

Grace in the wilderness. What precious things did you find or create or nurture in the past year that you want to take with you through the threshold?

The door is open.

Jeremiah again: “There shall be a day when sentinels will call in the hill country of Ephraim: ‘Come let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God.’”

We are going from a time of almost forced isolation and introspection to a time when our gaze and our thoughts are upward and outward.

What different perspective on God do you take with you?

How is your religious faith informing your re-entry into the wider world?

What are your “ultimate concerns?”

We’re moving from isolation to the “going out and coming in” that was central to our lives in the before time, that we have missed and longed for.

How will you now allow yourself to discover dimensions of God in your coming and going?

Busy and chaotic days will once more be upon us. It will, I think, still take some time before we start to feel that life is hectic once more. No one usually asks the experts for a timetable about when we will get back into the busyness and rush and crush of life—by Christmas? A year from now?

How will you make room for the kind of Sabbath rest that leads you to say with the Psalmist: “God increased my strength of soul?”

Now, what are the challenges you might face?

As we go through the threshold, we will have new and different experiences.

How will you find sustenance, nurture?

What will be the narrow gate for you—the opening that leads to life?

In a few minutes the choir is going to sing a Shaker hymn, “Followers of the Lamb.”

Shakers moved in their worship and invented in their lives. Listen as the choir sings and you will almost feel the need to get up and stomp your feet and dance. It’s certainly possible to imagine a dance of entering through the narrow gate as we follow in the way of Jesus Christ.

I invite you to join in that dance—cautiously or enthusiastically—as the Spirit leads.

And God will keep our going out and our coming in from this time on and forevermore.