

Luke 11:9-10
May 31, 2015

One of my favorite books, growing up,
which was actually the first in a whole *series* of wonderful books,
was C.S. Lewis' great adventure fantasy for kids,
"The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe."

I know I'm not the only one in the room who loved it.

You remember the premise, probably:

four kids in England, two brothers, two sisters, discover in their grandfather's house a
magical wooden wardrobe.

When they step into it, and close the doors behind them,
they cross over from the world they know

into a new world, a new land: the land of Narnia.

And in Narnia, there are centaurs and fauns and a talking lion, Aslan, who is majestic
and beautiful and good.

You remember.

My cousins and I used to play "Narnia."

In my aunt Betsy's house, in one of the bedrooms, there was a closet along the wall
with two sliding doors.

And is what we would do:

We would slide the door on the right over,
step into the closet, and close the door.

"This is the wardrobe", we would say to one another.

And we would stand there for a little while, contemplating our journey,
and then we would push our way past the coats and shirts and skirts,
just like Edmund and Lucy had done on their way to Narnia,
and we would slide the other sliding door open, and step out.

And now we weren't in Lexington, Massachusetts any more.

We were in Narnia, and there were surely centaurs and lions to be found.

Between the closing of one door,
and the opening of another, was our magical mystical place,
a place where we journeyed from one reality to another.

That place, where one door closes and another soon opens,
was a place we filled with our excitement and anticipation as we imagined something
wonderful ahead.

I was thinking about my cousins and that magic closet, with its two doors, just this
week.

I was thinking about how much of our lives is lived in that place,
in that place where one door has closed
and another door stands in front of us.

Where we have left one reality and are crossing into the next.

For us kids, it was exciting to be in that in-between place,
our imaginations in full play, ready for what wonders opened to us beyond the next
door.

For us as we grow older, that in-between place can be just as exciting....
and it can be pretty darn scary, too.

Now is the time of year when David and I spend a lot of time with couples about to be
married.

They are in that in-between place --
leaving behind what they have been on their own
and about to step through a door into marriage.

We love being in that place with them, that place of eagerness and anticipation --
we talk about what their lives have been to this point,
and what their life together will be.

We give them an excruciatingly long questionnaire to do,
which asks them things like whether they feel the other person really listens to them,
and do they agree on what to spend money on,
and does your partner do anything that really drives you crazy,
and what delights you in each other.

And then we talk some more.

And then, on a May afternoon or a June evening,
we lead them through vows and bless the rings they give,
and that next door swings open.

It's not just wedding couples that are in the in-between places.

A whole lot of our young people have just graduated --
 they've heard their names called out as they walked across a stage,
 and a diploma was placed into their hands--
 Behind them, a door has swung closed --
 ahead, a door waits to be opened into whatever it is that comes next.
 Jamilah George, our wonderful ministry assistant,
 did just that last weekend --
 walked across the stage at Yale Divinity School,
 and took her diploma firmly in hand
 the door to her life as a student there swinging shut,
 the door to who she will be in this world starting to open.
 She will, I guarantee, be someone spectacular.

And it's that time of year for moves and new jobs--
 It breaks our heart to say goodbye, but we've got some families in the congregation
 whose summer will *be* that in-between place --
 packing up a household to move on to something exciting and new ...
 the door closing on a life lived here, the door to a new life slowly swinging open.

These are the thresholds of our lives,
 the in-between places --
 like my cousins and me standing in the closet waiting for the magic door to open,
 we live, often times, in that place where we wait for the next door to open,
 knowing that the one behind us has closed.

There are those who believe that it is on the thresholds of our lives that God is most alive to us.

That the in-between places in our lives are the most sacred of all.
 That our God IS a God of the threshold,
 the God who waits to meet us at that place where one door has closed,
 and the next is just about to open.
 When Jesus said "knock and the door will be opened for you,"
 when he said "I stand at the door and knock,"
 when he said "I am the gate, the way,"
 that's what he was saying: God is the one at the door with you,

on the threshold, in the in-between place.

It's true: God hangs out on the threshold.

God comes to us in those places where we don't know quite how it's going to turn out,

God is with us in uncertainty and change,

God is with us in the joyful anticipation of what is yet to be,

and in our anxiety for what is yet to be.

On the threshold, when the already is past

and the not yet is still coming,

God is what IS, standing on the threshold with us to lead us through the door to all that can be.

In January, I visited our daughter Brigitta in Abu Dhabi.

It was a city full of people who had traveled there from somewhere else;

the shopkeeper from Kashmir, the guide from the Philippines,

and the cab driver from India who drove me back to the airport on my last day.

I liked him particularly --

His name was Mohammad; he was all of 23 years old, and *he* was living in an in-between place --

he had left his family behind to come to the Emirates,

and he had dreams of what he would become.

He had closed a door behind him, and he could see the door ahead,

but for now he was living on the threshold,

in the in-between.

And he had such a strong sense of God's presence.

I always pray, he said. *I always know that God is with me.*

It gives me courage.

A faithful Muslim, he thought it was great that I was a pastor.

Churches, mosques, we should have them all, he said -- *and nightclubs.*

(He was 23.)

We talked and talked -- it was an hour-long ride.

As we neared the Dubai airport, I was looking in awe at the sights of the city,

the world's tallest skyscraper is there -- and then I saw a sign for the *Mall of the Emirates*.

"Hey, isn't that where they built that indoor ski slope?" I said.

"You want to see it?" Mohammad said, and veered wildly onto the exit ramp.

And so it was that on my way to the airport, I ended up at the famed indoor ski slope in Dubai.

"Take some photos," my friend Mohammed said helpfully.

"I'm going to go pray." And off he went to the prayer room in the mall.

I've thought about him often --

a boy far from home, living on the threshold between his old life and the one to come,
between one country and another,

a door closed behind him, another cracking open.

No family with him, but never alone:

because he knew, in that place in-between, that God was right there with him.

God, after all, hangs out on the threshold.

My friend had *chosen* to step into his in-between place;

the wedding couples we meet are making a choice, a delightful choice.

But the thresholds we cross are not always ones we choose;

Stepping into that in-between place is not always something we had sought to do.

There are times when the door that has closed behind us

was not one we wanted to close,

and the in-between place is not a place we wanted to be.

It may be a loss that has rocked us back onto our heels,

grief that has sent us into a tailspin,

a change that was anything but wanted.

And we find ourselves not *knowing* when that next door will open,

or onto what.

The writer Joan Didion wrote, a few years ago,

an extraordinarily powerful book about the grief that followed her husband's death,
the in-between time in which she then found herself:

'*The year of magical thinking*', her book was called,

and in it she spoke with candor and heartbreak

about grief, *that place*, she wrote, *that none of us know until we reach it*.

And in that place, she wrote, where we mourn our losses,
we also mourn, for better or for worse, ourselves. as we were, as we are no longer.
A door has swung shut.
It is the in-between place, and it is hard, it is hard.

I read an essay this week by a Navy chaplain,
written soon after he returned from serving in Iraq.
It was his reflection on the threshold on which he found himself,
as the door to his life in combat closed behind him
and he found himself in a place of uncertainty, unsettled.
His in-between place was hard, hard place to live,
a shadowy one, full of memories of what he'd seen;
IED attacks, he wrote, wounded children, rockets flying over my head.
When I returned, I entered a world of darkness, he wrote.
I didn't know any more if God existed, and for a priest and a chaplain that was a
harrowing admission.
But I desperately prayed for God to show up again.
I struggled until I began to sense in that place the presence of a loving God.

And what he wrote then really struck me.
I am far more willing now to walk with someone through the valley of the shadow of
unbelief because I have lived there, he wrote.
I think the real miracle is that God can give us the grace to go through the most
difficult times even when we have no faith at all.

In other words, he was saying,
even in those moments when we think we are alone in that in-between place,
we are most certainly not alone.
The God of the Threshold is ever, ever present.

I know, I know, that many of you in this room today
are in that in-between time,
on the threshold between what was and what is yet to be,
one door closed, the other one soon to be open.
Some are moving into a new time of life, chosen, anticipated, joyous;

some are in a place of change not expected, and frightening.
Some are in that place of grief that Joan Didion described,
where a life lived with someone loved has come to an end,
and the life that lies ahead is not yet discernible.

God is there.

Whatever in-between time you find yourself in,
God is there in the strangeness and uncertainty,
in the anticipation and the eagerness,
in the sorrow, in the joy.

God is there *so that* this place,
this threshold, *can be* the most sacred of places for you.

Remember the story with which I began this sermon --
the story of my cousins and me in that place between two doors
imagining it to be a mystical place.

The truth is, that place *is* a place of mystery and wonder and spirit.

Because God stands beside you in that place --

God who is your peace, your courage, your joy, your calm --

God who is your hope.

The God of the Thresholds never leaves us alone.

And the door will be opened unto you.

Amen.