

Our Doors Are Always Open **Revelation 3:20**

I'm standing on the front lawn of the church.
It's late March 2020, the world is shut down and scary.
A woman comes across the church Green, walking slowly,
and pauses when she gets near me.
We aren't masked, because we didn't know all that then,
so without the mask I can see that her face is sorrowful,
and there are tears in her eyes.
Hey, it's March 2020. We're all pretty teary.

What a beautiful church, she says to me.
I wish I could go in, she says, I need it.
Oh, you *can* go in, I say.
The doors are open. The church is still open.
And then there are even more tears.
And she goes inside, and she sits and prays. A long time.

That scene repeats itself again and again and again.
And no matter how times I say to people
"the church is open,"
I feel no less joy saying the hundredth time than the first time.
It felt so good to say "our doors are open to you."
When people needed a place simply to sit and to be in the presence of God,
a place to take a deep breath and breathe in the Spirit,
how much joy it gave me to say come on in.
We are open.
The same kind of joy I feel when I stand up here on a Communion Sunday
and look out at everyone who's here,
and say "all of you, all of you, are welcome at Christ's table."

We made the decision right away in March to keep these church doors open.
With hand sanitizer everywhere and cans of Lysol spray —
but open.
We just couldn't imagine doing anything else.
Though soon thereafter, a message popped up on my phone from a rather significant
town official
that made my palms sweat.
"Was walking by your church and saw that the doors were open," the message began. My
heart stopped briefly.

The next line said simply “Thank you. We came in and prayed.”

You may think I’m making much of our opened doors.
 But the truth is that these open doors
 this year have represented so much more than simply the entryway to an old wooden
 Sanctuary.
 These doors, ever open, represent everything about what we have been as a church all
 this year.

All through this crazy, most peculiar of years,
 this church has been open.
 And by that I mean this:

Our hands have been open in compassion and generosity.
 From the very first week of the shutdown,
 church folks were in touch with David and me to say
 we need to give, and we need to give now.
 In that moment, the Bridge the Gap fund was begun,
 and with it we have done so much —
 stocked the shelves of the North End food pantry, [photo]
 delivered meals throughout our community and into Bridgeport [photos]
 and so much more.
 We have been *open handed* in generosity and compassion.

We have been *open-hearted* in service.
 For a week in July, all the teens who had planned to go to Appalachia instead came
 together to serve in new ways.
 They packed boxes full of love for fifty families whose homes we’d repaired last year.
 They built benches — 32 benches — to sell and raise funds for the Appalachia Service
 Project. [photo]
 Our Junior Deacons drove all around town in August,
 distributing the Easter eggs that had been meant for April,
 and planting signs that proclaimed ‘Kindness is contagious.’ [photo]
 And our church kids produced dozens and dozens of cards for medical workers - and
 patients — and those stuck at home — with such tenderness and love. [photos]
 We have been *open hearted*, this congregation, truly.

We have been open to learning, and open to other voices.
 In a time when, more than ever before, we are called to listen, truly listen,
 to learn, truly learn,
 the people of this congregation have shared in dialogue,

thrown themselves into study and reading and listening —
and made signs and marched, too.
We have been open to the voices of others,
and to learning from one another.

And we have been open to God's Spirit.
We have found new ways to worship,
and to be together as one body of Christ — differently, creatively.
We've worshiped from home [photos].
We've worshiped outdoors! [photos]
We've baptized and confirmed in the beauty of God's creation [photos]
We have— truly — been open to God's presence,
and we have felt the Spirit in powerful new ways.

In 2020, we have been ever-open.
Open hearted, open handed, open to the Spirit, which has led us down new paths of
discovery.

But none of this is new.
The truth is, openness is at the heart of who we are as a church,
at the heart of what we represent to the community around us.
It is what we try to live out every day.
Our doors — in every possible way — are open to you — and to everyone.

Which means, fundamentally, that everyone belongs here.
Everyone.

It doesn't matter what faith background you arrive here with.
We say this every time new members join our church:
we remind them, all of us,
that there is no litmus test that they have to pass,
no creed they have to memorize —
that wherever they are on the journey of faith,
and the journey of life, they are welcome here.

And at the beginning of every school year,
as kids show up for the first time to our youth groups,
I say the same thing to them:
I assure them that this church is an open place, and a safe space.
I let them know that they are received and loved as they are,
the same way God receives and loves them.

That's why, by the way, over the years, any number of kids have felt safe coming out to their peers in a youth group meeting here.

That's why our marriage ministry has always been open to any couple.

Our doors are open. Our hearts are open.

There's a powerful verse in the Book of Revelation that David and I have both always been drawn to.

Revelation chapter 3, verse 20.

It says this:

"Behold [says Jesus], I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and share a meal with them."

What it says is that it is up to us whether we will open the door.

It is up to us whether we will live as people who open wide the doors of our hearts, open wide our minds and our spirits —

but when we do,

we will find that the one who is waiting to come in is none other than Christ himself.

At Greenfield Hill Church, we believe this.

We believe in open doors —

quite literally the doors of our church,

but also the doors of our hearts.

We are open to one another, we are open to our world,

we are open to every child of God who comes through the doors.

And by so doing,

by so living,

we are open to Christ himself,

who stands waiting on the other side of the door to be welcomed.

David and I are proud to serve this church.

We are proud to be pastors of a congregation

so openhearted in caring,

so open to the voices around us,

so open in its welcome and its compassion.

In the weeks ahead, we will be asking you to help us continue to be a place of welcome.

We will be asking you to help us keep the doors of this church open.

This is that time of year we call Stewardship season, when we ask all of you who care about this church to help us keep our doors open — because, quite honestly, we can't do it without your help.

We're asking you, all of you, to pledge what you are able to the work of our church in 2021.

For those of you who have pledged before, you'll receive a letter from us this week.

For our new friends and followers, we need your help, too - visit our website, and please lend a hand.

In this most crazy of worlds,
we believe — no, we *know* — that what is most needed
is for us to be open to one another,
open to the God of love,
and open to Christ's leading.

With your help, this church on a hill will continue to be that place where the doors are always open,

and where we encounter Christ himself in the face of all who enter in.

Amen.