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 Arlington Street Church  
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## **Open the Door**

Moments before the opening of a service of installation for a new minister, in a church vestibule teeming with participants, I am wedged in among the musicians, talking with Peter Donnelly, the front man for the band *Comfortable Shoes*. Our conversation is incongruously intimate; I touch his arm and tell him I've come to believe what May Cheever, one of Arlington Street's elders, said to me years ago:

*When one door closes, another door opens.*

Without missing a beat, Pete responds, "Yeah, but it's hell in the hallway!"

As we step over the threshold into this new year, I want to encourage us not to wait around for that closed door to open. Let's open the door!

The Persian poet and Sufi mystic, Rumi,<sup>1</sup> says,

*The door of the One who created the world is always open.*

Here's a new translation of his poem I shared with you recently.

*Don't Go Back to Sleep*

The early breeze before dawn  
 is the keeper of secrets.  
 Don't go back to sleep!  
 It is time for prayer;  
 it is time to ask for what you really need.  
 Don't go back to sleep!  
 The door of the One who created the world  
 is always open.  
 Don't go back to sleep.

Let's open the door!

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1 1250-1310

Our friend Jeanne Weaver's mother and father both died over the past year. Just before the holidays, she and her sisters met in Iowa. She writes, “We had a great last twenty-four hours all together at our parents' home. We slept in our childhood beds. It was bittersweet; I kept telling myself it's only a house, and I have my memories forever, but it was still very hard to walk out the last time. We had a lot of good times there over the last sixty years. Now I guess it's time to grow up and move on.

“It's a count your blessings thing,” she continues. “There were all kinds of coincidences that convinced us it was meant to be. No other house in town had sold for over a year; ours is a hundred years old and has termites and still passed inspection. We just felt it was our mother making sure that the buyer, a single mother, could have a nice home.

“She's had a very hard life: some drug problems in the past, and raising two children in a dumpy trailer. But she got a good job at the local Bella window factory, and was so excited about having a nice house. We left the appliances, including an almost new washer and dryer, and she cried, saying no more going to the dingy laundromat late at night. She's never had her own. So all of that made us feel much better. I could just hear my mother's voice saying, 'you girls get moving on....’”<sup>2</sup>

It's hell in the hallway, but the door is always open. Let's open the door!

My preaching student, Debbie Jean, an American Baptist, told this story: One night, a pastor in the midst of a crisis of faith returned from a meeting to his study, where he found the lights on and the door propped open. A young man on the church maintenance staff had just painted the door; like many men from Latin America, the painter's name was Hay Seuss, spelled J-e-s-u-s. “Hay Seuss” had taped a note to the lintel.

*Dear Sir;* the pastor read.

*Do not close the door.*

*Signed,*

*Jesus.*

The pastor took it as a sign, and recommitted himself to leaning in to his relationship with G\*d, and taking risks with his faith.<sup>3</sup> One of the great things about

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from e-mail sent by Jeanne Weaver to Kem Morehead, Thanksgiving time, 2009. *Thank you, Jeanne!*

<sup>3</sup> Debbie Jean, *Blue Christmas*, preached at Wilson Chapel, Andover Newton Theological School, 12/14/09

being Unitarian Universalists is that we can hear this story and don't even need the note to be signed by Jesus to take it as a sign! To us, all names signal the presence of the divine hand, calling us to be in relationship with the spirit of life. Let's open the door ... and leave it open!

I'm positive that in 25 years of ministry, I have never quoted from the book of Revelation, either in the pulpit or anywhere else. But here it is, worth hearing and worth memorizing, even. In Revelation it is written,

*Behold, I have set before thee an open door, that no one can shut.*<sup>4</sup>

It's yet another of those aphorisms that may and may not be true ... but how wonderful would it be to believe it? "I have set before thee an open door that no one can shut." What if we choose to act as if we believe it? Let's open the door!

When we begin to see moments of choice, moments of intersection or transition, as points of entry to new possibilities, new experiences, we begin to see doors everywhere. You know American poet Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken*.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
But as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

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4 Revelation 3:8

Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
 Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
 I took the one less traveled by,  
 And that has made all the difference.<sup>5</sup>

Let's open the door!

And then there are the times when we're leaning against what we thought was a solid wall but turns out to be a door; or when we tumble through a door that suddenly gives way after we've been leaning on it for a long time; or when a door at which we had stood knocking and from which we've turned opens, after all, and we are beckoned back to it, and through it.

And then there are the times when the “door” metaphor fails, in that “life is hard and then you die” kind of way. I'm thinking of John Culver, my beloved Provincetown parishioner. When the going gets rough, he intones, “Either this will kill us, or we'll have a great story to tell!”

But let's turn our attention to the possibility – even the probability – that *intention* might just make the tipping-point difference ... intention that all might just be well, might just work out for the best, in a way we can't see or even imagine and maybe even know, ever. Let's cultivate that intention to look for the door and give the handle a good, hard turn and step over the threshold – or, occasionally, throw ourselves over the threshold – into something brand new. That's what it means to be faithful to a vision: faithfulness asks of us the spiritual practice of courage, the spiritual discipline of giving ourselves to the possibility of the open door.

When we come to life looking at each new moment as a door, even a moment of apparent upheaval and chaos can be transformed into a threshold. On Christmas Day, Kem and I arrived at Logan Airport to fly to Tucson for a brief vacation. After several hours, we became two of the 40,000 wannabe wannabe travelers grounded over the holiday weekend (misery loves company). The first available flight out wasn't scheduled for two more days.

Debating whether we should just head home to wait it out or try to get as far as Dallas and hole up in a crummy motel, we texted our dilemma to the friends who were expecting us in Tucson. The phone rang. “Go to Dallas,” they said immediately.

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5 from *Mountain Interval*, 1920

“We've booked you into the Four Seasons; it's all taken care of. The hotel restaurant is just great, and there's a beautiful spa there. Have a massage! Put everything on the room. Merry Christmas!”

Let's open the door!

My spiritual companions,

It is time for prayer;

it is time to ask for what you really need.

Don't go back to sleep!

The door of the One who created the world

is always open.

Let's live as if we believe it: “Behold, I have set before thee an open door, that no one can shut.” Out of the hallway and over the threshold! Who knows what awaits us?

The Austrian poet Rilke wrote,

And now let us believe in the New Year,

New, untouched,

Full of things that have never been.

Let us go forth, then, with courage and faith. I am so happy, so grateful, and so blessed to go with you.