

## **“Knocking on the Door”**

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Stewardship Sunday

October 20, 2024

*“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”*  
(Matthew 7:7-11)

As we kick off our annual Stewardship campaign this morning, we are looking with fresh eyes into the glow of the small stained-glass window at the end of the center aisle, which depicts Christ knocking on our door. I say “our door” because, if you look closely at the wooden door and its circular metal pull, it is easy to see the form and pattern of the doors that hang at the rear entrances to this sanctuary. My guess is the location of that window was chosen very intentionally, so that worshipers, as they were leaving the sanctuary after worship, would catch the light coming through that window and be reminded that we are always being invited to answer God’s call, always being invited to a closer walk with Christ. It is a great reminder that God’s presence is always close to us.

It also reminds us that, with the assistance and encouragement of God’s abiding presence, Larchmont Avenue Church is knocking on the door of some amazing new realities. Attendance and enthusiasm in worship continues to grow. Our programs for children and youth also continue to blossom, as particularly shown in the Compassion Camp we hosted in August, when more than thirty children from ages 2 through 12 brought these halls to life for five energetic days of learning and fun. A new women’s bible study started this month, and we are currently working to schedule compelling speakers to help kick off a brand-new discussion group called the Seekers. As the comedian Milton Berle once said, “If opportunity doesn’t knock, build a door.” And right now it feels like, here at LAC, both of those things are happening. Some great new opportunities are already knocking at our door, and we are also busy opening new doors to welcome new possibilities that are just now coming into view.

The biblical passage that inspired that window back there comes from the third chapter of Revelation. There, John of Patmos is sharing God’s perception of seven churches. There are seven cities actually listed, but the number seven – which in the Bible symbolizes fullness and completion – suggests that the lessons are meant for every church, every congregation. Some of those churches are being more faithful; some have a less than stellar record. But all of them are called to new growth, new types of service. And John concludes the section with these words spoken by Jesus Christ: “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and



*you with me... Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.*<sup>1</sup> In the window you can see the first words of that passage, from the King James Version of the Bible: *"Behold! I stand at the door and knock."* As is often the case in Revelation, the statement is both a warning and an invitation. Christ is always knocking at our door, always ready to come in and help us to become something new, something better, something even more useful and more faithful in the eyes of heaven. The knock at the door thus represents both the hope and the expectation that we will rise to the occasion, renew our commitment, and truly invite God into our lives.

Interestingly, the passage I just read from Matthew also talks about knocking, but in this case we are the ones who are encouraged to knock. The passage comes from Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, which I would argue is the most concentrated and intense session of teaching of Jesus' entire ministry. And in this part of the sermon, he makes a lofty promise. *"Ask, and it will be given you,"* Christ says. *"Search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."*

It sounds like an **incredible** promise, and I use that word intentionally, because I will admit to you that, sometimes, that promise comes across to me as... not very credible. It is a promise that is difficult for me to believe, because I know that in my life there have been things I have asked for that I did not receive... there have been things that I have sought for that I did not find... and there have been doors on which I knocked but were not opened for me. Sometimes asking, seeking, and knocking on the door just doesn't work out the way we want it to.

It's like a story I once heard about a poor and hungry man who was wandering the countryside of England and came upon a welcoming little pub. The sign above the door, as most pub signs do, bore both the name of the establishment (which was "George and the Dragon") as well as an artistic rendering of that name. On this particular sign, the painting below the pub's name depicted the local legend of George, the patron saint of England, clad in shiny metal armor, slaying an awful dragon that had been terrorizing the countryside. The wandering man was hopeful that this pleasant place, the George and the Dragon pub, might be generous and help out a weary traveler in need. "As the Lord says," the man thought to himself, "everyone who asks receives."

So he knocked on the door, and when a woman in an apron opened it, he said, "Ma'am, I am sorry to bother you. But I am down on my luck, and I wonder if I could trouble you for a bite to eat?"

To his dismay, the woman's face tightened into a scowl. "Get out of here, you no good bum!" she screamed. And she slammed the door right in his face.

When the shock wore off, the man meekly knocked again. When the same awful woman opened the door, the man quickly said, "Ma'am, do you think I could have a few words with George?"

That, I would say, is someone who understands the promise of Christ. That is the posture of faith. I said this a few weeks ago, but I think it bears repeating. Prayer is not a vending machine. It's not a matter of dropping a prayer in the slot, pushing the buttons for exactly what we want, and then waiting for God to drop the prize into our hands. We are in no position to make demands of God. I'm not sure they were thinking theologically when

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 3:20-22.

they wrote the song, but I do think that the Rolling Stones were really onto something when they penned the lyrics “You can't always get what you want. You can't always get what you want. But if you try sometimes, you just might find... You get what you need.”

When we come into the presence of God, we are invited to ask for what we need... to seek what we hope for... and to knock on God's door to, as Paul says, “make our requests known to God.” We are not promised to receive everything we ask, right when we ask it. But we are promised that God's peace will surround us, and, even if we do not get what we want, we are promised that God will respond, that God will answer, and open the door to what we really need.

And, if we dig just a little deeper into what Jesus really said on that hillside in Galilee, we can understand the exact promise he made with much more clarity. Bear with me a minute, because this is one of those places where being a bit of a grammar nerd comes in handy. The way English translates the original Greek, Jesus gives us three imperatives in this lesson... three commands: Ask, Seek, and Knock. But the English words fail to capture the fact that, in biblical Greek, there are two kinds of imperatives. A “present imperative” is a command to do one thing, and to do it right now. The “aorist imperative,” however, goes beyond the present moment. It suggests something that is to be done only once, but a pattern of behavior that is intended to be ongoing. Because the statement of Jesus uses the aorist form, what Jesus is really telling us is this: *“Ask and keep on asking and it will be given to you; seek and keep on seeking and you will find; knock and keep on knocking and that's when the door will be opened to you.”*<sup>2</sup>

Some of you are old enough to remember back in the 1970's when driving an eighteen-wheeler across country became romanticized. “Smokey and the Bandit” was a box-office smash, with Jerry Reed singing “East bound and down, loaded up and truckin.” Our family even bought a CB radio that year that we set up right there in our Chevy Caprice family trickster station wagon. On occasion Dad let me call out to all my good buddies on the highway doing my best Burt Reynolds impression. I am sure professional drivers hated that kind of stuff, but I thought it was the coolest thing ever.

If you remember that time, you might remember the words on the mudflaps of those 18-wheel rigs: “Keep on Truckin.” When it gets lonely on the road, when it's just you rolling down a dark highway, that is what Christ wants us to do. Keep on truckin'. Don't just ask; keep on askin. Don't just seek. Keep on seekin. Don't just knock, but keep on knocking and knocking and knocking and knocking because that effort -- and that hope -- is not in vain. God is right there on the other side of the door, knowing our every need... feeling our every joy and pain... always with us.

When we combine these two biblical images: Jesus saying to us “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” – and Jesus also saying to us, “Keep on asking, seeking, and knocking on my door,” then we understand that the life of faith is a mutual search. Christ is seeking us, while we are also seeking Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://biblehub.com/amp/matthew/7.htm>

The only difference is that Christ always knows where we are, always standing at our door. It's harder for us. We, on the other hand, have to work to find God. In the opening words of his classic work Look Homeward Angel, Thomas Wolfe describes the human condition as a search for a door that we once knew well. But as we grow older, we drift farther and farther from it, and after a while we can no longer find our way back to that door. We get turned around, Wolfe says. Or in his exact words, we become lost "in the hot mazes, lost, among bright stars on this weary, unbright cinder, lost! Remembering speechlessly we seek the great forgotten language, the lost lane-end into heaven, a stone, a leaf, an unfound door."

Even so, Christ asks us not to quit – encourages us to keep on looking... to keep on asking God for help... to keep on seeking that lost door into heaven... and then, when we think we may have found that door, to knock, and keep on knocking, knocking with the hope and perseverance of someone trying to get home... and knowing in our heart of hearts that the living God is right there on the other side.

**Amen.**