

5/6/07 Fifth Sunday in Easter Acts 13:44-52

There are times in our lives when we find the doors of opportunity slamming shut all around us. An opportunity we thought would work out is dashed. The expectation that something would go as planned is disrupted when an unexpected problem crops up. A door once seen as a viable option closes in our faces.

Often these situations are accompanied by deep disappointment or grief as we mourn an opportunity that got away or as we lament a possibility that may have never been there in the first place. We find ourselves stuck, staring at the locked door immobilized as we imagine how things might have been.

Oh, how we want everything to work out just as we had planned it. For in planning, we in some way think we can control how a situation will turn out. However, experience tells us that reality often disappoints us and we are forced to face a closed door.

Our first reading this morning from the Acts of the Apostle tells us the story of Paul and Barnabas facing a closed door as well. They have been invited to speak and when they show up at the engagement, the whole city has turned out to hear them share the Gospel.

Unfortunately, there are a few resentful Jews in the crowd speak who out against them and attempt to contradict what Paul and Barnabas is saying. Rather than be immobilized by the door closed in their faces by their opponents, Paul and Barnabas turn to face an open door.

An open door that if you read the whole story of Luke and Acts you would realize has been facilitated by the work of the Holy Spirit. The open door before Paul and Barnabas is now the opportunity to bring the message of Jesus Christ, the Gospel--- to the Gentiles or non Jewish people.

For the most part up to this point in the early Church, the Christian movement was almost exclusively a mission to Jewish people. However, that door was closing and another was opening. The door that would open would eventually bring Christianity to the entire world.

And throughout the Acts of the Apostles-- Luke (Now, let me just step aside for a moment and tell those of you who don't know this that the Acts of the Apostles was actually written by the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke.)

Anyway, Luke makes it very clear that this movement of Christianity outward from Jerusalem to the ends or uttermost parts of the earth is being facilitated by the work of God's Holy Spirit. Therefore the door that has been opened for Paul and Barnabas has in some way been opened by the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about this story is that Paul and Barnabas don't stand and wallow at the closed door that they are confronted with. But, rather they turn and see that although one door has been closed another is now opening.

So they shake the dust off their feet and move on to Iconium. Shaking the dust off their feet would have been symbolic of them saying ---I'm done with you, you are no longer my responsibility. Paul and Barnabas decide to walk through the open door that has been presented to them.

Each of us throughout our lives, like Paul and Barnabas, is invited to the possibility of moving through open doors. Doors that have been opened to us by the work and ministry of God's Holy Spirit.

I'm certain that each of us has doors in our lives that are open or that are beginning to open and we wonder if we should step through them.

Some of us, who are here for the first time and quite literally saw an open door that you decided to step through. You decided to see what this community was all about. I welcome you and say we are so very glad that you decided to step through those doors this morning.

As someone in St. John's community, I see a number of doors open to this community as a whole.

Over the next few years, the properties immediately to my left are going to be transformed through the Northwest Triangle initiative into a neighborhood of condominiums and townhouses. A door is opening for us and we need to think about how we can, as a community, intentionally welcome these neighbors.

Each week, there are new faces in our midst and those of us established in this community have an opportunity and dare I say a responsibility to reach out to welcome these new people into our midst.

Now that is regardless of whether that new person is sitting in your favorite spot. For some reason no body ever takes my spot.

We as a worshipping community might also have the opportunity to explore some new and innovative worship experiences ---thanks to the door of opportunity seen by Jim O'Hara and others.

We have a newly formed communications committee that is exploring how we might better get the word out about St. John's. **But, please don't tell any of them that what they are actually doing is evangelism, I'm afraid it might scare them off.**

There are a doors opening and closing all the time. And I'm sure that you all see some of the doors that David or I can not see. I would encourage you to share those doors of opportunity with David or I or even someone on the vestry. For it is us

collectively who will be most accurately able to discern the work of the Holy Spirit in this community.

Not only are there open doors in our lives together, but there also are numerous open doors in our personal lives. Unfortunately, its not always clear which doors we should step through or which doors when we get close to them are going to slam in our faces.

However, we can be sure that God's Holy Spirit will walk with us through the doors together. God's Spirit will help us to turn from our closed doors when we have been immobilized by grief, disappointment, or pain to see other possibilities. And God's Spirit will be with us when step through the wrong door and that door closes behind us.

AMEN