



## LESSONS for LIFE

December 28, 2008 7:00 p.m

### LESSONS FROM THE EARLY CHURCH FOR OUR CHURCH

Door #1, Door #2, Door #3 – Your Choice!

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Door #1 – door #2 – door #3, you choose. A little different from the topic this morning of the ultimate makeover, but tonight has leanings in the same direction. Here we are in the last Sunday service of 2008, literally. For some there's a feeling that we've made it. For others, as I mentioned this morning, it's sweet good bye to less than a lovable year. Yet just because the year passes it doesn't mean that we actually let it go. There are situations that we will review and cast a weary eye over because of choices we made and decisions that we left in limbo. We will remember the doors of opportunity that were before us. We will also happily and, in some cases maybe sadly, recall that we knocked on the door of opportunity or we walked right past. We will recall whether we entered that door that brought us positive things or we simply stood outside wondering whether or not we should enter. Before we knew it the opportunity had passed and the door was locked. Indeed how many of us have left home with one set of keys which we later discovered to our great chagrin did not unlock our bicycle, did not start our car, worse still did not open the front door that we were hoping for?

Let's pray - or maybe I should say it's time for you to pray for yourselves in this sense of exactly what you need to hear tonight that will help you confront 2009 and start your journey. (A period of quiet reflection followed)

God hear our prayers. Amen.

I vaguely recall a game show called "Let's make a deal". How many of you remember that show? Good, good, good, I don't feel like I'm out there by myself. I think it stopped showing in 2003 before some of you try to guess my age. While I didn't see the show often when I did I was quite intrigued by its process. It was noted as a game of intuition, decision making and, indeed, greed. When I think about it I thought it was just a game of gut feeling and guessing. I believe that there were three doors, although some research tells me that it could have been three curtains, but tonight we're going to say it was three doors.

And this was how the show was played. Each day some 31 contestants, who wore some weird costumes, tried to get the attention of the announcer. After identifying some contestants the announcer would shout at the top of his voice, "Come on down". And then there would be shouting and hooting and excitement from everyone in the studio. There would be up to 3 contestants at the same time and the announcer would encourage them to make a deal with him. The deals involved several offers. It could have been an unstated amount of cash in a wallet or an unknown prize behind a door, there could have been a set of keys which could have opened anything from an empty box to a brand new car. The audience could select one of several envelopes which contained hundreds, maybe thousands of dollars or the contestant would be shown several items and be asked to price them. You get the drift. You can imagine that there was lots of emotion and



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angst from the contestants who wanted to get the best deal. And the audience of course always had their opinion.

Nearing the end of the show some of those folks with prizes were asked whether they wanted to trade them. You know what human nature is like. We want more. So the announcer would tempt the contestants by sweetening the deal or tempt them with possibilities of what could be behind the doors and the possibilities of getting more, getting something bigger, getting something better. At the urging of the audience the contestants would either keep what they had, those were the safe, conservative types, or be a risk taker who would risk it all. Door #1, door #2, door #3 – you see the doors represented the hopes and dreams of the participants. The items that they hoped were behind the door were items that they could not afford, but oh they wanted them so badly. They wanted to be winners and leave with the prize. When the big question was asked, “Which door?” much thought was generated by the contestant as the audience loudly gave their advice. Some were shouting door number one, some were shouting door number two, and some were shouting door number three. Absolutely no help to the contestant, but sometimes the contestant was swayed by the volume of the audience. Sometimes they did very well and upgraded their wins to rooms of furniture, appliances, home entertainment units, cars, fur coats, trips worth thousands of dollars or indeed thousands of dollars in cash. What a win, but conversely they could relinquish their previous wins and be stuck with a “zunk”; that is a silly prize. Those prizes ranged from, as the door was opened, live animals which could have included a skunk, some pigs, donkeys or maybe rooms of worthless junk, broken down cars or oversized moose heads, just what we all want. Whatever they won, they had chosen the door to their fate.

Our world presents us with many doors. I’m often intrigued as I walk around neighbourhoods. Despite lovely entrances to lobbies, for instance in condos, doors are all the same, but in houses there are wooden doors they may come in light oak, dark oak, pine, mahogany etc. There are metal doors, there are doors that are plain, there are doors with design, there are doors some of which I notice are painted bright red to sombre grey. There are some doors with huge panes of glass which you can see right into the house and there are other doors with just a big enough peep hole so that the person inside can see you, but you can’t see them. Oh and how the doors to our homes may be very different to the doors in Rosedale or Forest Hill. Doors to corporations may appear welcoming yet powerful indicating that while they welcome us in they are in total control and you will abide by their rules once you cross over the threshold. Doors to churches can be welcoming, but you know sometimes those doors can be pretty difficult to open. You see doors in their own way may well represent what lies behind them. They make a statement.

Our Scripture this evening is taken from the radical gospel of St. John, also known as the Maverick Gospel. Its chapter 10 verses 1 – 3 and 6 – 10. *Verily, verily; it’s simply just a word meaning hey listen up, I say unto you He that answers not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same as a thief and a robber. But he that answers him by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he called his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.*

*This parable spoke Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things of which he spoke to them. Then said Jesus to them again, Listen up, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. I am the door. If any person enters in, they shall be saved and they shall go in and out and find pasture. I am come that you might have life and that you might have it more abundantly.*



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This is one of the many parables where Jesus says he is something in comparison. Here Jesus is saying He is the door and the story is linked to being a shepherd, but not just any shepherd – the Good Shepherd. There's a sudden shift of a metaphor from shepherd to gate and it seemed really strange to me, but in reality it's not.

You see in olden days: I mean do we have any sheep people here? People who know anything about sheep? Okay, great, I'm going to tell you something then. But in the olden days when the sheep returned to the fold at night after a day of grazing, the shepherd stood in the doorway of the pen and inspected each one as it entered. If a sheep was scratched or wounded by thorns, the shepherd, supposedly, anointed it with oil to facilitate healing. If the sheep was thirsty, he gave them water. After all the sheep had been counted and brought into the pen the shepherd actually lay down across the doorway, so that no intruder, man or beast, could enter without his knowledge. The shepherd; therefore, became the door. And when Jesus uses the "I" that simply emphasises that the shepherd is the sole determiner of who enters the fold and who is actually excluded.

As a shepherd, Jesus' main purpose was the salvation and I know that's a loaded word for many people. In this sense the term is used as the health of the sheep which he defined as free access to pasture and fullness of life. Under the shepherd's protection and by the shepherd's gift they can experience the best life can have to offer.

So tonight there are three doors in front of you and they represent different aspects of your life. You're not on "Let's Make a Deal" this is real life. So you tell me, well don't tell me, you tell yourselves what is behind your door #1? And my question to you is this, do you want to hang onto it and carry it into 2009 with you? Door #2, what's behind your door #2? So I ask you questions. Do you want to hang on to it and carry it into 2009 and you wonder what if or do you want to make a trade possibly for something better? What's behind your door #3? Do you want to hang on to it and carry it into 2009 with you and wonder what if or do you want to make a trade possibly for something better? A possible makeover or do you want to fling the door wide open and let everyone in because of what you have to offer?

As we say good bye to 2008 with all of its positives and negatives and the memories that will stay with us, in some cases longer than we care to have them, there is in some cases a lot to personally consider. How we have interacted with others, has it been honest or have we held back parts of ourselves so as not to offend others to our own detriment? You see, when we're not honest with ourselves and others we cause ourselves to diminish. We become less than and before we know it we are wondering how did we manage to get so far into a rut. Is there some long held anger that has been eating away at you behind those doors? Is there resentment that's been simmering for most of last year and it's about to explode at any point? Are there some low self esteem issues that need to be checked and worked out? Are you hiding a talent behind one of those doors; a talent that can be used in church or help with your career path? Is there a drive for justice? Is there a longing for compassion behind your door? So again I ask you, if you had three doors in front of you that reflected your existence, what would be behind them? Would you want anyone else to know?

At the end of the parable Jesus says that He's come to give life, not just any old life, but life abundantly. Right here, right now. Like Jesus, we are also doors to our world. Each of us has our own special spin, our own colour, our own style, our own glass, our own variance. We can be



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welcoming or imposing. How do you see yourself? How do others see you as a door? What type of door are you?

As we enter a new year may we be doors that offer justice, peace, hope in an unknown world.

Amen.