

Please enjoy photos embedded from Pastor Janet's 2008 Lenten pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

"WORSHIP for April 5, 2020



Be **Called to Worship** by praying from your Bible: **Psalm 100:**

Or, if able, click on the link below to read:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+100&version=NIV>

If able, you may also click on the link below to listen:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/audio/purevoice/niv/Ps.100>



Pastor Janet

Pause or sing to continue in prayer for the world with **this Opening Hymn** from Psalm 100:

If able, click on the link below to sing "All People Who on Earth Do Dwell"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhUiRonlzaQ>

Call to Confession: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1John 1:8-9. *(Pause now for a time of silent confession.)*

Proclaim aloud, our **Assurance of Forgiveness:** "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death." Romans 8:1.

If able, click on the link below to sing aloud the Gloria Patri:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dgcYD_m4OhU

Proclaim aloud, our **Call to God's Word:**

"Scripture cannot be set aside... What does Scripture say?" John 10:35 & Romans 4:3.

Pray aloud, our **Prayer for Illumination: Lord, give us eyes to read, ears to hear, and a mind, heart, body, and will to heed your will, according Scripture. Amen.**

*If able, click on the link below to enjoy the **Anthem: “Hosanna, Loud Hosanna”***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPieBgoTZkl>

On this Palm Sunday, please open your Bible for our final reading from the Sermon of the Mount in the Gospel of **Matthew 7:7-14.**

Or, if able, click on the link below.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+7%3A7-14&version=NIV>

SERMON: “Ask at the Narrow Door” by The Reverend Dr. Janet Hufford

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you,” the passage begins. What an appropriate verse for a Lenten focus on prayer, and a comfort during a time such as this. The entry point into God’s message for us today is appropriately gates and doors. Fitting since being an entry point, literally, figuratively, and theologically, is the major function of gates and doors. After all, who would build a structure with an interior without a way to enter? As such, there are over 500 references to gates and doors in Scripture.

Besides being functional, gates and doors can also be ornate. Think of gates in Asian countries, like China, our “sister” country for whom now regularly pray since October of 2019, before she caught the world’s attention with reports of an unknown virus in December, spreading into the USA by January of 2020, and now known as COVID-19. A door has opened to a world-wide pandemic.

Thank God for doors that are welcoming and beautiful. Real estate agents say that they have curb appeal. During the order to stay at home, I have heard that it has been a busy time for spring cleaning and home improvements, perhaps to entry doors. In Israel, skilled craftsmen elaborately decorated important gates, often naming them, like the Beautiful Gate of the temple and the 8 gates of city of Jerusalem.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus entered through an Eastern gate facing the Mount of Olives where he descended to enter Jerusalem. This Eastern gate is also referred to as the Beautiful Gate, the Golden Gate, and the Mercy Gate. This is the gate through which the temple messenger passed in order to take the sacrificial lamb into the desert on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The present eastern gate is above the currently underground location where the Messiah entered at his coming. The Jewish people in not recognizing Jesus as the Messiah still wait for that entry.

Muslim tradition waits too at the gate, believing it's significant in Allah's final judgment and resurrection. **Ezekiel** passages (**10:18-19, 11:23, 43:1-5, 44:1-2, and 46:12**) in Judeo-Christian Scripture are often taken to mean that the eastern gate is the one through which the Messiah will enter to usher in the fullness of the kingdom. To Christians, this is the 2nd coming of Jesus, since he already entered on Palm Sunday. In order to stop this final triumphant entry, the gate was thrice sealed by Islamic leaders. Once in 801AD, and again in 1187AD. Since Ottoman Sultan Seliaman the Magnificent sealed the gate in 1541AD, the gate remains shut up. Just over a year ago, in February of 2019 the interior of the gate was open from the temple mount for Muslim worshippers, but access is denied to others and the exterior remains sealed.



The Golden Gate in al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the Old City of Jerusalem, March 2019.

Photo credits: Olivier Fitoussi (left) & Emil Salman (right), published by Nir Hasson in "Haaretz" Mon 3/24/19.



Other doors worth mentioning are those of homes in Egypt, where the Hebrews used hyssop to apply the blood of the Passover lamb to their thresholds that allowed death of plague to pass over them. Here at FPCP we claim the blood of the final sacrificial Lamb, Jesus, through the iconic red doors by which we are well-known in our community. These doors carry the name of First Presbyterian Church above them. Wooden carvings are also in the threshold of the interior doors leading from the narthex into the back of the sanctuary. When we are able to enter our sanctuary again, take a look sometime, if you've not noticed them before. But our doors are double wide not narrow. Likewise, the gates of the temple and the city of Jerusalem are wide rather than narrow for ease of entry.

So, why does Jesus direct us to “enter through the narrow gate”? And why is the gate narrow rather than wide? For this answer, consider the need for security at gates. For example, TSA secures airport gates. Security cameras and alarms are positioned at the doors of homes and other locales. Picture how some old gates form a bridge over moats to enter a city by day, which are drawn up to close the city door at night. The Hebrew words referring to gates in the Old Testament most often refer to city gates. The wide gates into cities that remain wide open for entry during the light of day are shut when there is threat of attack and at night. At night to enter a city, if allowed by the gatekeeper, one has to pass through the more secure narrow door, cut out of the wide gate. A little door in a big door. I saw one example of a narrow door, like this, in the Holy Land, the door into the church of the nativity at Bethlehem (*shown below*). Before travel came to a recent halt, perhaps others, too, have seen it.



One such narrow door is referred to by Jesus as “the eye of the needle.” The eye of the needle is the more secure little door within the big city gate. For a trade merchant to enter a city at night, it is a dangerous and arduous process. First, all the goods are removed from the camel. Then the camel is lowered on its belly to shimmy in thru the small narrow door, which is not easy! After the camel enters, then the owner and the goods go through.

But nowadays the language of the narrow gate might be offensive, associated with being narrow minded. Some might object that entry to all should be permitted. However, there is a Biblical response to the objection.

For this, turn now to the New Testament, where we find one main word to mean either door or gate. However, a difference from the Old Testament Hebrew is that the Greek word usually refers to a gate or door, not of a temple or city, but to a sheep pen.

Open your Bible to read **John 10:1-18**.

Or, if able, click on the link below.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john+10%3A1-18&version=NIV>

To listen, click on the link below.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/audio/dramatized/niv/John.10>

Jesus, the shepherd, is the gatekeeper, guarding the entry to the sheep pen. Even more Jesus is the gate, who lays his own body down in front of the door's threshold, to protect his sheep. He willingly stands in harm's way for us. He not only risks, but fully gives his life for us. No matter what alarms, bells, and whistles are installed at a door, what other door does that for us? Jesus is not an inanimate object, like an ordinary door. Jesus is the 2nd person of God who is in a loving and life-giving relationship with us. The world may say that the door should be wide open and that there should be not just one but multiple doors of choice, like on "Let's Make a Deal." Yet if we are trying to get to a specific place, there is only one right address. Further, knocking at the wrong door, usually doesn't help us to get in anywhere. If we ask at the wrong door, asking the wrong gatekeeper, we likely walk away empty handed or worse off than we were before, getting a stone rather than bread or a snake rather than a fish. The only safe gate is Jesus. The only good and right gate is the narrow gate. Rather than life, all other gates lead to destruction. I remember that my daughters once corrected me when I used the expression, "I love you to death." "No mom," they objected, "You love us to life." Even more, Jesus loves us to life. In finding the narrow road, the narrow way of Jesus, who is The One Way, we enter the narrow gate into life.

Then, at the end of the journey, when night is over, which Celler reminded us is "not yet" in the 3/15 children's message, there comes a time when the gate of the city of New Jerusalem is open. Open your Bible to read **Revelation 21:10-13 and 21-27**.

Or, if able, click on the links below.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=revelation+21%3A10-13&version=NIV>

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=revelation+21%3A21-27&version=NIV>

Though the gate is open, not all enter. Verse 27 says, entry is made by "only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." **Revelation 22:14-15** are similar. "'Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.'"

We may be tempted to leave out verse 15 where there are those outside, but verse 19 warns, "And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll."

Once I was convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit when with a dying woman, I left out verse 15, listing who was outside the gates. Once convicted, I immediately went back to the woman to apologize, and read the full passage. Then I asked if my including verse 15 took away from the comfort offered her in the passage. She responded, "No," because she was a fully confident that as a believer in Christ, she was able to enter the gates of New Jerusalem. As a follower of Jesus, who is the gate, she knew her name was written in the Lamb's book of life. Following our time together, she soon went thru the narrow door to be with Jesus.

Don't we want the same confidence that our robes are washed, that we, like the doors of FPCP, are covered by the blood of Jesus, so our name is written in the Lamb's book of life, for us to have entry into the kingdom?

In these days of trouble in the world, may we usher many to the narrow gate and encourage them, too, to knock and enter in. The Holy Spirit provides power to witness (**Acts 1:4**)

Perhaps another way to consider the wide gate in comparison to the narrow gate is to think again about entrances into our own family homes. Whereas, the wide, front door may be used for temporary visitors, the narrow path that leads around to the back door is how our family comes in to gather together around the kitchen table.

Note how similar Matthew 7:7, "Knock & the door will be opened to you," is to **Revelation 3:20**, written to the lukewarm church of Laodicea. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." Here it is Jesus who knocks at the door, that is at the door of our heart, for us to let him in to join us at a family meal. Thru the narrow door, we are in the family of God at the family table with Jesus Christ, Our Lord. This is the good news of Jesus: we are welcomed home thru the narrow door. In these days, there is a wise order to "stay at home." Jesus wants us to invite him in, so he will stay with us, making his home in our hearts. Praise God for the narrow, blood stained door of salvation thru Jesus, who is the gate! Amen. Let us pause in response...

Or sing the **Hymn of Response: "All Glory, Laud and Honor"**

If able, click on the link below

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXpMWtbHQvw>

Please Remember to Give in Continued Dedication to Our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Messiah

For more information, see the paragraph at the end.

Pray now as Jesus taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Sing now our **Closing Hymn: “To God Be the Glory”**

If able, click on the link below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CeBoSQsBR0>

Benediction: Even before it is time for the doors of our homes to open again, find new ways to go into the world praising Jesus with great celebration, as people did on Palm Sunday, that the world, too, may know Jesus, as the Son of the Living God, as the Messiah, as the One who has already come for us, and as the One who will come again as *Melek Olam*, the King of not just the world, but God Most High, who reigns over the entire cosmos. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

*Jesus says as written in **Revelation 3:20**, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”*

Lenten fasting does not last; Holy Days of feasting come.

Pandemic fasting does not last; Jesus came and in his coming conquered death.

Sunrise
over the
Sea of
Galilee...

to remind us
that The Son
has risen!

Giving remains important for the church to continue to carry out ministry, pay bills, and have funds for payroll for the permanent church staff, who will continue to receive pay to meet their living needs. Giving through automatic payments made through your bank are especially helpful. Contributions may also be mailed weekly or monthly. There is also the ability to give online through the church website. Please continue your faithful giving and consider an increase, even a small one, if able, during these difficult times. FYI on 3/15/2020, I pledged to increase giving by \$20 more per month. For more information, please read the stewardship message entitled, “Do Not Worry about Tomorrow” offered on the church website.