Valley Presbyterian Church (USA)
Oasis of Grace

Church of the Open Door
Revelation 3:7-13
July 27, 2014

Turn with me to the sermon page of your bulletin. Look down at the sermon notes, and notice that I have written some words in the note section. We are in a sermon series on the letters written to 7 churches in the book of Revelation. Today is letter 6.

The 7 letters follow a format, and I have written that format down for you:

Jesus Described
Good Point (about that church)
Bad Point (about that church)
Exhortation (God gives them something to do)
Promise (If they remain faithful)

So, as I read our scripture passage this morning on the church of Philadelphia, see if you can follow the outline for this church. And here is an assignment to prepare for next week's message: read church number 7 (Laodicea) and see if you can follow this outline. And if you are really into it, go back over the previous five churches and find these items.
Before we read, let us pray. Holy Spirit, open up your word this day, so we may be fed and challenged, and to know the joy of serving you. Speak to us this day. Amen.

Read Revelation 3:7-13
One of the neat things Larry and I have discovered as we studied these letters is that the name of Jesus and the promise to that church relates specifically to that church. So in order to understand the letter, we need to understand the specific church and the situation it finds itself in. So bear with me as we do a bit of history….I guarantee it will enrich the name of Jesus and the promise given to this church.

Philadelphia was situated near an active range of volcanoes. The ash from these volcanoes made for fertile land that was just right for growing grapes. Philly was the Napa Valley of Asia Minor. However, volcanoes also meant earthquakes. In 17 A.D. a massive earthquake leveled Philly. There were so many aftershocks that most of the people lived outside the city for some time.

Philly was a city that kept changing its name. After the earthquake of 17 A.D. , the Roman Emperor helped the city out by removing their obligation to pay taxes for five years so the city could recover economically and financially. Out of gratitude, Philly changed its name to "Neocaesarea" which means "New Caesar." They wanted to honor Caesar in thanksgiving. In 80 A.D., the city changed its name again to "Flavia" which was the family name of the current Caesar.

Well, all good things must come to an end. In 92 A.D., to encourage the growing of grain crops to feed the Roman armies, the emperor (Domician) issued an edict demanding that half of the grape vines be cut down. Volcanic ash is not suited for the growing of grain, so this edict hampered the economy of Philly. The city felt betrayed.

So Jesus comes to this church and says, I am the One who is holy and true. "Holy," meaning Jesus is the Messiah." True," meaning that Jesus is faithful and true to His promises. Jesus is dependable and trustworthy – unlike the Roman Emperor. You can trust me, Jesus says, not Rome.

I want to pause a moment. What if we, this church, received a letter like the ones in Revelation? How would the letter start out? What name would be given to Jesus that relates to our church?

I came up with two. Thinking about us as a retirement community, a place where people age and the body begins to break down and lose strength, our letter from Jesus might start out with: "These are the words of the One who upholds you with His righteous right hand"…quoting from Isaiah.

Or how about: "These are the words of the one who is the Author and Finisher of our Faith" which is a name given to Jesus in scripture and refers to the beginning of life and the end of life.

Perhaps at Fellowship time after the service or at breakfast and lunch today, talk among yourselves and finish the statement: "These are words of the one who…." And then

finish it by relating a name of Jesus to our church. Send them to me, and I can share them with you next week.

Back to our scripture passage:

Jesus says this church has little power. Other translations say the church is weak. We don't know exactly what that means. Maybe the church was small in number. Jesus says they are working, but maybe they had no impact on their community. Maybe they were struggling financially.

Despite their weakness or lack of power Jesus says something wonderful about them: they are still faithful to the Word and faithful to Jesus; just like Jesus is faithful…unlike the Roman Empire.

By the way, did you notice that Jesus had nothing bad to say about this church? Next week's church is completely different.

In the midst of all of this, Jesus begins to speak about…..doors. It's in Jesus' name or job description and it is in the body of this letter of what Jesus is going to do for this church.

Let's think about doors for a bit. I don't like closed doors (this is me speaking, not Jesus!). While growing up, I was taught if someone closed a door in our house, that person was to be left alone…whether it was someone closing a bathroom door; or someone was sick and Mom would close that person's bedroom door; or one of us was in time out and our door was closed to our bedroom. We were warned, if a door was closed, you do not open it. Only my Mother had the authority to open and close doors in our house.

Doors give you a clue to someone's emotions. I used to have a roommate who declared what kind of work day she had by how she opened and closed the front door after she got home from work. If she came in and slammed the door shut, we knew she had a really bad day, and we all knew to leave her alone. Unfortunately, this was very frequent.

Have any of you had a door slammed in your face? I remember fighting with my brother in our basement, and stomping up the steps and slamming the basement door on my brother.

Or, how about doors of hospitality? If I am invited to someone's home, I love it when I walk up to the front door and the door is already open for me. I know I have the right place, and I already feel welcomed. If the door is closed, I begin to wonder if I have the right day or the right time or the right house.

Here at the church, Larry and I have an open door policy. We try and keep the doors to our office open as much as possible. It says to a person walking by: feel free to stop in and say hi. However, if our doors are closed that might not be a good time to stop in.

If you think about it, doors are pretty powerful.

Jesus talks to this church about doors. It starts with the name of Jesus. Jesus is "holy and true, who has the key of David. Whatever he opens, no one will shut and whatever he shuts, no one opens."

The key of David refers back to an OT scripture passage (Isaiah 22: 15-22) which is about the chief steward to the king of Israel. The steward controls access to the palace and to the king. God gets angry with the current steward , removes him from office, and appoints a new steward. God says to this new steward that God will give him "the key of the house of David; he shall open and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open."

Sounds pretty familiar, doesn't it? It's the name of Jesus in our Revelation passage. Jesus is the one who holds the key of David, the One with all authority. Jesus has access to God's Kingdom.

Because Jesus holds the keys of David, Jesus is the way into the very presence of God. I'm jumping ahead, but if you look at the reward for this church, they will be pillars in the temple of God. The temple of God was a picture of the presence of God with the Israelites. To be in the temple of God is to be in God's presence…accessed by the one who holds the keys of David.

Then Jesus goes on and says to this church: I am placing before you an open door, which of course no one can open or shut except Jesus.

There are a lot of open and shut doors in the Bible. In the book of Colossians Paul says, "And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ" (Colossians 4:3).

In the Book of Acts, Paul wants to travel to a province of Asia to preach the Gospel, but he is forbidden by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16). The door is shut. Then he tries to go a different direction "but the spirit of Jesus did not allow them." Another shut door. Paul finally has a vision or dream of man beckoning him into Europe. The door has opened.

In Corinthians, Paul says, "a wide door for effective work has opened to me" (I Corinthians 16:9)

Jesus is in the business of opening and closing doors in the lives of His people. I bet if you look back through your life, you can see all the open doors, and the shut ones as well.

Maybe God has closed the door of children for you, but opened the door to ways of serving God that you never could have imagined. This is what God has done for me – closed the door to marriage and children, but as a result I can serve more fully in ministry.

Maybe God closed a door to a particular career choice, but God opened the way to a different career that became very fulfilling for you. Maybe God has closed the door of perfect health, but opened the door for you to draw closer to God in ways that never could have happened if you were healthy.

Remember the famous line in the movie *The Sound of Music*: When God closes a door somewhere He always opens a window.

Our task, as individuals and as a church, is to recognize when the door is open and when it is shut. Pray that God will give you, and us as a church, the spiritual wisdom to see the doors when they are open and to know when they are closed. There is no need to try and open a closed door because the One who has the keys of David is the only one who can open it.

If it is open, our task is to run through it as fast as we can! Go out in faith. Don't miss out on the opportunity of the path to blessing.

So I ask you as individuals: What is your open door? Will you walk through it?

I ask all of you as a church: What is our open door? What steps do we need to take to go through it?

I cannot end this sermon without talking about the promise to this church. I can imagine it is given to them as they walk through their open door, as they continue to keep God's Word and do not deny His name. In other words, they remain faithful .

Let's read the reward again: "As for those who emerge victorious, I will make them pillars in the temple of my God, and they will never leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of God, the New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from my God. I will also write on them my own new name."

The first promise: I will make you a pillar in the temple of God and you will never go out of it. Remember what I said about the city of Philadelphia at the beginning of this message? The earthquake and its aftershocks were so bad that the people had to live outside the city. Jesus is promising stability in His Kingdom. They will never leave it. They will not be on the outside. They will never be separated from the presence of God.

It is usually the pillars that are still standing in the ruins. Even though you are weak, God says, you will be strong like a pillar in the kingdom, and you will remain.

The second part of the promise: they will have written on them three different names: the name of God, the name of the city of God, and Jesus' new name. Remember how the city of Philadelphia kept getting new names? These people understood what it meant to have a different name. And they are going to get three of them. One that says they belong to God. One that declares their final destination. And one, the new name for Jesus, which by the way, no one knows what that is.

I wonder what special promise will we receive as we remain faithful?

I end with a blessing and a challenge: For those of you who are weak, you are made strong in Christ. Open doors and opportunities are set before you. Jesus desires to make you pillars – firm and unshaken. You are built like living stones into His Holy Temple.

May we be the church of the open door. I have to tell you: Mik, our custodian, came to me this morning and said, "Did you really mean for us to be the church of the open door? Because the main door was open and unlocked when I arrived this morning!" We literally were the church of the open door this morning!

So, invite people to meet God through the open door of Jesus, who brings us into the presence of God. And when Christ opens a door of mission and opportunity for us here on earth, then enter it with boldness and trust in the One who holds the keys of the kingdom and blesses more richly than we can either ask or imagine.

To the One who is holy and true. Amen.