



## Opening Doors

**A Lent course to help the people of the Diocese of Chichester  
in knowing, loving and following Jesus**

**Session 5 – written by Andrew Mayes  
and edited by Rebecca Swyer**

### **Theme for session 5: Opening doors to the future**

This week we reflect on the Easter mystery through the imagery of doorways. We consider our baptismal calling to open doors. We end with an act of rededication.

## Suggested opening prayers (10 minutes)

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*Prayers and psalms can either be said 'responsorially' (i.e. a leader leads and others respond), or 'antiphonally' (i.e. two groups of voices, each saying alternate verses). Music / hymn / song suggestions are made, but whether or not to include them, and at which stage, is entirely up to you.*

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you  
**and also with you**

Glory to you, Father, who forgives our faults  
and heals our infirmities.  
**Your mercy endures forever**

Glory to you, Lord, merciful and kind,  
slow to anger and abounding in mercy  
**Your mercy endures forever**

Glory to you, Lord; you who are a  
tender Father toward your children.  
**Your mercy endures forever**

*Psalm 24 (this translation is from the Common Worship psalter):*

The earth is the Lord's and all that fills it, the compass of the world and all who dwell therein.  
**For he has founded it upon the seas and set it firm upon the rivers of the deep.**

'Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord, or who can rise up in his holy place?'

**'Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, who have not lifted up their soul to an idol, nor sworn an oath to a lie;**

'They shall receive a blessing from the Lord, a just reward from the God of their salvation.'  
**Such is the company of those who seek him, of those who seek your face, O God of Jacob.**

Lift up your heads, O gates; be lifted up, you everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.  
**'Who is the King of glory?' 'The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord who is mighty in battle.'**

Lift up your heads, O gates; be lifted up, you everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.  
**'Who is this King of glory?' 'The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.'**

**Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.**

*A prayer*

Almighty and everlasting God,  
increase in us your gift of faith,  
that, forsaking what lies behind and reaching out to that which is before,  
we may run in the way of your commandments  
and win the crown of everlasting joy,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen**

*Hymn/song suggestions: Go forth and tell! / When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*

## Introduction / Recap (15 minutes)

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- What was your experience of a pilgrimage or visit to a 'stretching space'?
- What has it taught you about God? About others? About yourself?

This week we reflect on the Easter mystery through the imagery of doorways. We consider our baptismal calling to open doors. We shall be ending with an act of rededication.

## Bible reading (10 minutes)

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Jesus said "Say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'"

He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body."

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.

Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God"

*'Lectio Divina' – a way of approaching scripture (slightly modified for this course):*

*First, have somebody read out the passages.*

*Next, keep silence so that each can ponder.*

*Then, take turns to read out the sections, with each person highlighting one word of their section. Keep a little silence after each.*

*Finally, have the passages read again by another voice.*

*Mark 14: 14, 15, 22-25*

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained"

*John 20: 19-23*

## First reflection (10 minutes)

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### The Cross: doorway to liberation

'Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast' (1 Corinthians 5:7). From the Hebrew *pesach* and the Greek *pascha* we get in English the word 'paschal', understanding the events of Christ's passion, death and resurrection in terms of a new Passover.

The very origin of the word Passover concerns the threshold of the Exodus. God's instruction to his people on the brink of their liberation from the captivity and slavery of Pharaoh is this: 'take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household...the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses....The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you' (Exodus 12: 3, 6-7, 13). The very threshold of the house is marked by the blood of the lamb. This is the threshold of the journey to liberation, the starting line of the race to freedom, the brink of escape: blood on the wood.

Jesus gathers his friends for a final Passover together. He understood his passion in terms of a new and final Passover. The disciples are expecting the usual elements, which include bread and wine, to be accompanied by the traditional *haggadah*, the words of interpretation. However Jesus gives a stunningly alternative *haggadah* and thereby reveals what he thinks about his impending death. In effect, he says 'This cup, with which you are expecting to recall the Exodus, is my blood to be shed for you. This unleavened bread, with which you are expecting to recall the eve of liberation, the night before the great escape to freedom, is my body to be broken for you.' In these words, Jesus is suggesting that the wood of the Cross will become a new lintel, a new doorway to freedom, the start of a new exodus into freedom, not from the tyranny of a pharaoh but from humanity's greatest enemies: death and sin.

In his action at the table, the basis for the Christian Eucharist, he inaugurates a new exodus, a new Passover, a new beginning for humanity. He is telling us that he sees the coming Cross as making possible a new release from captivity and from the incarceration of death and sin. On Calvary, a doorway to freedom is opening.

## The resurrection: doorway to mission

This Upper Room, the cenacle, is a powerful image of the place of prayer. The locus of the first Eucharist of the Last Supper becomes the gathering place for the disciples awaiting the Spirit of Pentecost (Acts 1:13). It recalls Jesus words: 'whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you' (Matthew 6:6). The Upper Room of prayer is a place of safety, intimacy and privacy, a symbol of one's comfort zone, one's personal life of prayer. It is where the beloved disciple had laid his head on the breast of Jesus (John 13:23).

However, the doors are locked and bolted, from the inside, denoting fear of imagined dangers outside (John 20:19). The Upper Room of prayer had become a prison, a place of self-incarceration. The Risen Lord passes through, and floods the disciples with an overwhelming experience of peace. But this is not a comforting tranquillity but an disruptive, energizing peace, for Jesus goes on: ' "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" ' (John 20:21,22). The disciples do not have the chance to simply linger in the presence of the Risen Christ, and savour the moment for themselves – they are immediately thrown out into the world, the cosmos – in the perspective of the fourth gospel, sometimes a hostile, hating place (John 15:18) yet the object of the Father's love (John 3:16).

And so the locked doors are opened. Someone has found the key and uses it. Someone undoes the bolt back. The needy world beckons...

'Receive the Holy Spirit.' This will be echoed in the Acts of the Apostles: 'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). The Spirit given in the Upper Room is not for the purposes of private edification, comfort or enjoyment. The Spirit is given as energizing, merciful grace that will open many doors.

In his narrative of the early church, Luke describes the pushing back of doors: 'When they arrived, they called the church together and related all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles' (Acts 14:27). Paul rejoices: 'A wide door for effective work has opened to me' (1 Corinthians 16:19). He testifies: 'When I came to Troas to proclaim the good news of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord' (2 Corinthians 2:12). He asks: 'pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison' (Colossians 4:3).

## Questions for group discussion (10 minutes)

1. What doors have opened for you during this course – literally or symbolically?
2. What doors seem, for the moment, shut – in your church and parish?
3. How will you try to open them?

## Second reflection (10 minutes)

### Baptism: doorway to the future

Near the door in many of our churches stands the font. It is often located there for two reasons. First, to remind us that Baptism is the entry point and doorway into God's Kingdom; second, as we leave the church, to remind us that we are called to live out our baptism in the world.

- Baptism plunges us into the paschal mystery. It immerses us in the love of Christ revealed on the Cross and at the Empty Tomb.
- Baptism affirms that each one is valued and treasured. We all have a part to play, a unique song to sing. We are each called by name.
- Baptism declares that by the gifting of the Holy Spirit we each have talents, skills and charisms, to be shared and used for God's glory. Each of us has a ministry, a way of serving, a way of revealing God's mercy to others.
- Baptism catapults us into mission. At whatever age Baptism is celebrated, it always looks to the future.

The baptism of Jesus himself leads from the river to the city, via the desert. As Jesus emerges, dripping, from the waters of the Jordan, he has ringing in his ears the great affirmation: 'You are my beloved Son, with whom I am

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well pleased.' He ponders his identity and vocation in his forty day sojourn in the desert. Then he begins his public ministry in Nazareth.

We too have spent forty days, roughly speaking, reflecting on God's call to us: now it is time to move ahead. We follow Jesus into the synagogue:

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

*Luke 4: 16-2, quoting from Isaiah 61*

### Questions for group discussion (15 minutes)

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4. Re-read those words from Isaiah 61, slowly, as applying to you personally. You share in Christ's mission today. What does this mandate look like in your own situation?
5. In what ways is this scripture already fulfilled in your life and church? Celebrate how far you have come.
6. As a result of the course, has any further priority emerged for you personally, or as a church? Name it, and offer it to God.
7. (If time allows) What is the next door you feel you are being called to open?

### An optional end-of-course exercise

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Each person is given a piece of A4 paper or card, folded in half, with some coloured pencils or felt-tips. The folded paper represents a doorway that is opening.

On the front draw a symbol or picture that represents yourself or your church, or both. It can be richly decorated and patterned or simple in design. Inside write: 'We believe God is calling us to ....' then add 2 or 3 priorities that have emerged or clarified as a result of this course. You can illustrate these or draw a suitable symbol for each of them. On the back you can write a short prayer encapsulating your hopes and call. If there's a suitable table, stand them all upright like open doors – symbols of surrendering your hopes and offering them to God. You can read out your prayer, if you wish, as you place your 'doorway' on the table.

### Concluding worship (10 minutes)

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*Optionally someone slowly pours water into a large bowl as a visual focus and reminder of baptism.*

In a few moments of silence let us ponder these three questions:

*Three things to ponder in silence:*

- What is your present ministry? Give thanks.
- How have you been revealing God's mercy and compassion recently? Pray for those whose lives you have touched.
- How is your ministry evolving? Entrust your future to Christ.

Those who are baptised and confirmed are called to worship and serve God. Let us renew our commitment to grow in God's mercy and to reveal God's mercy in the world.

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?  
**With the help of God, I will.**

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?  
**With the help of God, I will.**

Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?

**With the help of God, I will.**

Will you seek and serve Christ in all people, loving your neighbour as yourself?

**With the help of God, I will.**

Will you acknowledge Christ's authority over human society, by prayer for the world and its leaders, by defending the weak, and by seeking peace and justice?

**With the help of God, I will.**

May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith,  
that you may be rooted and grounded in love  
and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit.

**Amen.**

The Risen Christ says to his people:

"Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut" (Revelation 3:8).

*A prayer*

**Heavenly Father,  
as we celebrate this year of mercy  
open the doors of our hearts and minds  
that we may show forth in our lives the mercy and compassion  
that we see in the face of your Son Jesus Christ  
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit  
one God now and for ever. Amen.**

*The grace*

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore.  
Amen.**

*Optionally, close with a hymn or song – 'Go forth and tell' is particularly suitable*

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