

May 25, 2025

Sixth Sunday of Easter

“Open Heart”

Acts 16:9-15

Have you ever stuck around for a tropical storm or hurricane and tried to open the door to your house only to have it push back against you and close? My Jeep has really lightweight doors and there have been a lot of times in the winds we have around here that I've opened my door and before I can even swing my leg out it has slammed back shut. Sometimes I think this is the kind of thing our hearts in Christ are up against.

We know how the Holy Spirit works. Scripture is pretty clear about Him. The Word of God is proclaimed and the Holy Spirit works through that Word. It's quite clear in our Epistle reading today.

Paul starts preaching and we are told of Lydia, *“The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.”* That's about it. The Lord works through the Word and the next thing you know she is getting baptized. It is not by Lydia's own effort that she comes to faith. The Lord did it. Faith is a work of the Holy Spirit. This is made clear many places in Holy Scripture like when Paul writes to the Corinthian church, *“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”* Jesus says in John's Gospel, *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”*

So you and I, whether it be brought to faith in Holy Baptism as a child and sustained by the Spirit through that Word or being brought to faith by the Spirit and that Word and then to the waters of Holy Baptism, have been made to believe. The Lord has opened our hearts.

But lets face it, there is a hurricane of false teachings, worldly concerns, temptations, afflictions, sorrows and our own fallen natures trying to get us to close that heart right up again. And while it is only by the Holy Spirit that our hearts were pried open and we were brought to faith, we do play a role in remaining in that faith in the face of an enemy that wants to destroy it. Holy Scripture endlessly exhorts believers to be clinging to Christ, turning away from the world, struggling against temptation, standing steadfast in our Holy Baptism and being strengthened by the Spirit. This is one of the main reasons we gather as Christ's church, to be built up in our faith through God's Word proclaimed and receiving the very body and blood of Christ to spiritually nourish us and to support one another in our spiritual struggles against the world.

However, I believe a lot of Christians are in the habit of not being so focused on keeping that door to our heart open as we are on handling the things of the world that are very often intent on closing it.

Easy example—paying the bills. Prices have really gone up the past couple of years and incomes aren't stretching as far as they once did. Wind, hail and flood insurance premiums alone are crushing some folks' budgets. Many Christians react to this with the anxious struggle to rearrange payments, cut back on spending, and claw some more cash from somewhere all by our own power. Turning to God often doesn't come into the mix until we've reached that high level of desperation. It's like we allow God's presence in our life to be muted, that door somewhat closed while we handle our own life by ourself. It's not until we realize that's not working so well that we turn to God in prayer.

But if you throw that door to your life open from the git-go how does that change things? Well, first and foremost you know your sins are forgiven, your life is eternal, and this whole

budget mess is just a worldly bump on the road to a blessed eternity. You might recall that God has blessed you and brought you this far in life and has promised to be with you still. You might recall what Jesus said about not being anxious because God knows the number of hairs on your head and cares for you above all things of His creation.

I'm not saying this will wipe out your budget problems. I'm not even saying it will take away all your anxiety, even though it really should. What I am saying is that if your mindset remains world-focused you are going to be thinking life is a mess, your future is dismal, things are out of control and everything is hopeless. The cares of the world and Satan working behind them are trying to shut that door to your heart, drive you to despair and extinguish your faith.

But when you steer into that faith in Christ, the opposite happens. You lean more on your Savior. You trust Him for deliverance knowing that, according to His will and plan, deliverance from the world, though maybe not from its budget problems, is guaranteed. That door to your heart stands open to receive His eternal gifts and, despite the troubles, you have hope and perhaps even peace.

(Example: the faith of the martyrs)

This is true for all worldly troubles; finances, relationships, afflictions, injustices, health crises, social pressures, whatever. The Lord may not remove whatever the problem is, but when that door is open and you know His love embraces your heart, you know He will bring you through whatever that trouble is, even through death itself, to the life where trouble is no more. Not only that, it will change your perspective on that trouble in the here and now.

Jesus teaches and comforts His disciples for three chapters in John's Gospel as they travel toward Gethsemane where He will be arrested and head toward His blessed cross. Just before He begins to pray, He closes with these words, *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."*

In one way we don't care for these words because, well, they kind of guarantee that our here-and-now life is not going to be pleasant; tribulation will happen. But the Holy Spirit has revealed these words as truth, so tribulation is fine. We have peace with God through Christ and though the world's troubles blow fiercely and even painfully, Christ who has overcome the world, who is the door to paradise, stands open to us. One day the storms will pass and, taking His hand, we will be brought home.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, be focused always on seeing that door remains open no matter how Satan and the cares of the world try to blow it closed with the storms of life. When you let it close, then it's only you against the powers of the world and there is no peace to be found. When it is Christ for you there is always peace to be found, because Christ has overcome the world, its brokenness, its strife and its death. You can take heart, because the Lord has opened your heart, and in Christ you know He honors His promise to bring you through it all.

Amen.