

## WINDOWS VERSUS DOORS

Luke 13:10-17

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Long ago in the city of Florence, in Italy, there was a tax assessor, named Emilio, who busily tallied everyone's tax bill, from the poorest to the wealthiest. It was the practice in those days to measure a family's wealth by the size of the door to their house.

A poor person with a narrow wooden door would receive a small tax, maybe only half a florin, just a small little coin.

But a prosperous merchant who wished to attract more customers would have attractive double doors leading to his shop, and perhaps another door leading to the living quarters atop the shop.

Emilio would tax six florins for the shop doors and an additional two florins for the house door. That was a handful of coins!

Emilio was always challenged by the large gateways and doors to the palaces of the leading families of Florence. He would measure how many feet high they were, and then multiply it by the width. He would do this with each door or gate, and add all of them together. Sometimes he taxed over a hundred florins for a fancy house. That would make a heavy sack of coins!

But Emilio was considering service to God, and decided to go to Rome to pray for guidance. Of course, he went to the Church of St. Peter. It had huge bronze doors, and he stood in front of them with amazement.

He was busy calculating the tax he would levy on the Pope for owning such a large door, when he remembered why he had come to St. Peter's Church. He went inside to pray, and decided that he would remain in Rome and work at a simple job in service of God.

By chance, Emilio discovered the great Basilica of St. Peter needed a new sacristan--a person in charge of the sacred vessels, vestments and other church objects. He got the job, and was very happy. Everywhere there were candles and lamps through the great church. And it was Emilio's job to keep them burning.

Emilio carefully trimmed the wicks to keep the flame burning bright. He replaced stubby candles with long new ones. And most of all he replenished the many oil lamps that burned in all the chapels and niches of the great church.

Emilio was particularly careful to keep the many lamps at the statue of St. Peter burning bright, for this was the church of St. Peter. But he had a tender place in his heart for Mary, the Mother of God, and watched over her lamps very carefully.

One winter's night, when Emilio was alone in the great basilica, he passed by a statue of the Madonna and Child and noticed that the lamp had almost run dry. It was late, and the storeroom was locked. There was no way for him to replenish the oil... unless he took it from another lamp.

Emilio hesitated. He scratched his head and thought: "St. Peter has so many lamps, surely he will not mind if I take some of his oil to honor La Madonna." And so he did.

But that night Emilio had a terrible dream. St. Peter himself strode into his room and stood above his bed. His face grew red, his beard bristled, and then he clenched his great fisherman's fists so much that the muscles on his arms bulged like overstuffed sausages. Peter threatened Emilio:

"Do you know whose church this is? Do you know who it is named for? That's right. Me.

"And I don't want you taking any oil from my lamps for anyone, even for her. She has plenty of churches named after her around the world.

"But in my city, I am number one. And if you forget that, Emilio, remember that it is me who holds the Keys to the Kingdom."

Emilio awakened with a fright. He asked God for protection saying that everyone knew that Peter was a hasty man who could not control his temper. God heard his prayer.

"My good and faithful friend, do not be afraid. Peter may have the keys to the door, as he says.

But should you find the door locked, simply come around to the window. The Window of Paradise will always to open to you, my dear Emilio."

And so Emilio was comforted and never again worried about the door to Paradise being closed to him. Indeed, he would say to anyone who would listen:

"Most people only see doors. I was like that once, when I was a tax collector. Always measuring doors.

“But what I never saw were windows. Windows are so much more beautiful than doors. Doors are heavy and dark. Windows are light.

“You can see the Heavens right through them -- all the way to Paradise.”

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## **Windows versus Doors**

In the European world, wealth was centered, and displayed, in the great homes, palaces, cathedrals, and basilicas. Doors were a big deal. They were ornate, intricate, carved, inlaid with jewels, masterpieces in and of themselves.

And doors are what Emilio measured, assessed, determined height and width in order to levy the appropriate tax.

But his problem is that he is always measuring, always calculating. Everywhere he goes, he sees doors. Can you identify with Emilio? In the modern world, few of us work for the Internal Revenue Service, but most of us, at one time or another, live by measuring and calculating.

We calculate our careers, our investments, even our choice of partners and friends. We are encouraged by our culture to always calculate to the *Bottom Line*. In essence, we look at the world, and we see Doors. What’s in it for me? How can I make the most money the quickest way with the least amount of effort? What do I need to say or do to get that person to sleep with me? How can I manipulate the situation to my advantage?

Ever found yourself staring at one of those types of doors?

But Emilio experiences a conversion. No longer outside the church, he is literally inside the Church, serving God. Now, he is dealing not in taxes levied, but in gifts freely given.

And in the Church, he believes, things are different than they are in the outside world. Here candles are lit and lamps are burnt for no utilitarian reason but for the joy of honoring God directly and indirectly through His saints.

The shock to Emilio is that the Church also measures and calculates. Sometimes people don’t want to share gifts freely given.

Saint Peter is angered that he is not given the measure which he believes is due him. And poor Emilio fearfully thinks... *If I don't measure up, I will be punished.*

What about now? Can you identify with Emilio in this part of the story? Have you ever been shocked that the church also measures and calculates?

You came expecting love, but found judgment.  
You came expecting forgiveness, but found accusation.  
You came expecting a haven, but found a storm.  
You came expecting confidentiality, but found betrayal.  
You came expecting self-control, but found gossip.  
You came expecting honesty, but found lies.

You were measured, from top to bottom, inside and out, and found lacking. And so you crept away, tail between your legs, feeling like a failure, sure that God could never love and accept someone like you.

But our story doesn't leave Emilio afraid, stuck in an old way of thinking. The story doesn't leave us with a human solution to the dilemma. Our divine, creative, loving God steps in. And God offers Emilio a new way of imagining his spiritual journey.

“Emilio, stop thinking doors. Your life is frustrated by always thinking about doors and measuring them. And this makes you judge and measure yourself. You let the opinions of others matter more than my voice. Think about an alternative to doors.

Emilio, remember buildings don't only have doors...but they also have windows.

Something more transparent. A window permits light into your heart and mind.”

### **Windows versus Doors**

And that is the focus of my message this morning: sometimes we get stuck in old patterns, old ways of thinking, old ways of assessing, criticizing, judging. Our eyes get stuck at ground level, with what is familiar and binding, looking at the doors we lock and throw away the keys too. And instead, instead we need to re-orient our focus, to look up to the light. . To new possibilities. To a different taste of the Kingdom of God. To the windows that permit heaven to flow into our souls.

In the Gospel of Luke today, we read the story of a bent-over woman. She comes to the synagogue on the Sabbath. And Jesus notices her. A crippled woman. He has compassion for her. And he heals her.

And instead of celebrating the power of God and his miraculous healing, the Synagogue Ruler slams a door. His anger, his piety, his righteousness is tangible. The echo of that slamming door reverberates through the entire room.

Jesus, you are in so much trouble! You can't heal on the Sabbath! You're breaking the rules! And you—can you see his pointing finger?—you woman, sit back down and shut up!

The specific rule over which Jesus disputed with the synagogue leader was the rule about not doing any form of work on the Sabbath. The rabbis taught that an act of healing on the Sabbath was only permitted in a life or death situation, not in chronic cases where another day or two will make no difference.

Jesus clearly opposed this accepted principle. His method of argument was a common one among the rabbis — if you can show that a certain principle works in one situation, then it will necessarily hold true in situations of greater significance.

So in this case, he says, if you can do a work of mercy for an animal on the Sabbath, then it is even more appropriate to do such a work for a “daughter of Abraham.”

But this synagogue ruler was so immersed in his precious rules about when people could and couldn't be healed, about when they could and couldn't be set free, that he failed to see God standing right in front of him offering a different possibility. That the Sabbath was made to give honor and glory to God. That the Sabbath was made to bring mental, spiritual, emotional, *and* physical healing to shackled lives.

The glory of God shone so clearly, through a wide, open window to pierce his soul, and he didn't have the eyes to see it, to feel it, to comprehend it.

Ever been the synagogue ruler?

The rule-maker, the door-keeper?

Ever been Jesus?

The rule-breaker, the window-washer?

Ever been the bent-over woman?

The one who came in through the door, but danced out through a window?

In this instance, Jesus was modeling for us a “window” instead of a “door” in the life of faith community. He saw beyond the crippling limitations of this woman. He saw beyond her life of despair and hopelessness. He saw her whole, beautiful, a created daughter of God. And so he reached out, he touched her, and he restored her to life.

And the woman was transformed by the light of Heaven. She glimpses the sacred and mysterious God of the universe. She is so filled with God's Spirit that she begins to sing and dance. Nothing can contain her joy.

Are you bent-over this morning? Did you come through that door feeling burdened, like you can't stand up straight and tall? Do you feel like everyone's staring at you? Do you feel ignored or misunderstood? Do you feel neglected or untouchable? Is your life caught up in rules instead of grace?

Jesus sees you. You have not escaped his notice. He has compassion for you. He loves you. He wants to reach out and touch you, to bring complete wholeness to your life. He sees you as a beautiful son or daughter of God. He wants to open up the window of Heaven, to lift your eyes away from all those closed, imposing, impossible doors.

Our scripture story ends by telling us: And all the people watching were delighted.

Why?

They no longer just saw the doors . . . but also a window of hope. A new way of relating to God.

What about you?

Are you assessing, calculating and measuring life by the doors? Like Emilio at the beginning of our story, or the Synagogue ruler in the Biblical story?

*Or* have your eyes been drawn to the windows, where the light of heaven shines boldly through? And you can lift your hands in praise to God, dance around the room, and let the light spill over to all who come in contact with you?

Windows versus Doors

What do you see?

Let's pray . . .