

**The Swiss Church in London**  
**Audio service, Sunday 17 October 2021**

**Welcome**

“I am the door. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.” (John 10:9)

“C’est moi qui suis la porte. Si quelqu’un entre par moi, il sera sauvé; il entrera et sortira, et il trouvera de quoi se nourrir.”

“Ich bin die Tür. Wenn jemand durch mich hineingeht, wird er gerettet werden und wird ein- und ausgehen und Weide finden.“

Welcome to this audio service from the Swiss Church in London!

Take a moment to look around and observe the room or environment you are in. If you are in a room, it probably has a door. What shape and colour does your door have? Is it open, ajar, or shut, perhaps even locked? Do you prefer sitting in a room with open or with closed doors?

I’m an open-door person, most of the time. I like to hear what’s going on in the rest of the building. It makes me feel connected with the people using or inhabiting it, or if it’s the front door, it creates a connection with the world outside. I like to sit on the front steps of the church or the vicarage with the door ajar, watching the world go by. But then there are also days when all I want is to close the door behind me, shutting out the world.

Doors are multifaceted, and a wonderful symbol for life. We walk through or past doors many times every day, and yet we hardly notice them.

I sometimes wonder who lives behind all those doors in my street, my neighbourhood, and my gigantic city. Do people feel safe behind those doors, do they like to shut them; or are they prison doors, or doors that signify loneliness and isolation?

Doors, you might have guessed it, is what we will think about today. Doors as a symbol for our lives path, the doors that were opened to us or that we have opened ourselves, the doors that we have decide to close or that were closed in our face.

“I am the door”, Jesus says, “come in and go out and find pasture.”

We are united in the name of God, the parent, Jesus Christ, God’s son and friend of humankind, and the Holy Spirit that unites us all as we worship together apart.

Let us pray.

## **Prayer**

Great God,

we cannot always make sense of life.

Your purpose is sometimes hard to understand.

We sometimes feel frustrated when things don't work out as we have hoped,  
confused when the way ahead of us no longer seems right.

It is troubling when doors once open suddenly seem shut.

Was this door meant to be shut?

Or does it run counter to your purpose?

We do know for certain that where one door closes, another will open.

Help us, instead of regretting what has been, to look forward to what is to come, even if the future fills us with threat.

May we grasp each opportunity you give us as it comes.

Through all that life brings, and all the challenges we face, help us to see the way forward,  
to follow where you lead us.

In you is peace, in you is healing, always.

Amen

## **Reading Acts 16:6-10**

They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

## **Sermon**

*Shut doors, and open doors*

Sometimes, life seems like a journey of endless opportunities with new doors opening each step of the way; and sometimes, life seems like a journey of closed doors and missed opportunities, shut doors in front of us. How does life feel for you right now?

When I first came to the Swiss Church ministry eight years ago there were some unexpected circumstances standing in the way. My experience with church community in Switzerland

was that of local congregations where church members would randomly meet each other in the local Migros or live next door to each other, and I could call on their help at short notice. But here at Swiss Church in London, because of the unique history of our church, I encountered a congregation scattered across the metropolis, and even beyond. Ministry was different, and it took me some years to understand how to build community and do church in these circumstances. What I experienced as closed doors and a lack of opportunities at first soon turned into an avenue of open doors. Artists, homeless people, visitors from Switzerland, fashion people and local businesses engaged with the church alongside the Sunday congregation and church groups, and there was so much more opportunity for community growth than I've ever thought possible in the beginning.

That experience brought home to me what Apostle Paul had discovered centuries earlier as he tried first to enter Asia, and then Bithynia, where they were not allowed in, before finally recognising a call to Macedonia: the simple fact that when one door closes God invariably opens another. Life rarely goes as smoothly as any of us would like, our hopes sometimes dashed.

We are just coming out of a long stretch of shut doors – quite literally! The door of our church was shut. The doors of shops, museums, doctor's practices, and airports were shut. Even our own doors had to remain shut for visitors and we weren't allowed through our friends' doors. Wherever we turned, we were not invited in. The only door open to us was that of our own home, and perhaps that of a neighbour or close friend or relative.

### *Off-site church*

This week, the Swiss Church saw the opening of a major exhibition by the famous Serpentine Galleries. Serpentine approached us a few weeks ago to ask if they could use our beautiful church building for an off-site exhibition. The expression 'off-site' made me think. This is exactly what we have been doing for nearly two years now: we journeyed from being an on-site church to being an off-site church! Most of our activities, gatherings and services were no longer taking place on-site, in the church, but off-site, in various places, like for instance the audio services that bring us together every third Sunday for worship. The Consistoire meetings are taking place off-site on zoom, and the Mother's Group met in a park this week – and surprisingly some elements of the off-site church remain in place even though we could move them back on-site!

When the door of the church was quite literally shut, we began to discover the endless possibilities of being an off-site community, possibilities that two years we didn't know existed or wouldn't have considered suitable. Due to the nature of our church, we were always partly an off-site church, and I think this helped us tremendously to swiftly recognise the new doors that opened up all around us, and to follow the call of doing church differently.

We often associate church with a building, and many church families, such as the Roman Catholic, Anglican, or Orthodox churches, consecrate their buildings. They are sacred spaces. In the reformed tradition, buildings are not sacred. The people are, and it's the people, Christ's disciples, that turn buildings into sanctuaries, wherever they go.

Early Christians weren't used to meet in churches. All they had were their houses, or often they would go from place to place to spread the gospel. They depended on other people's hospitality. Church buildings are a later development that came with the recognition of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire. Church buildings became a symbol of power and representation of the new religion, and they also provided larger spaces for people to gather and worship.

So, in a way, off-site church is the return to the very roots of Christianity. Meeting in houses and local parks gives us a better understanding for how early Christians gathered. Church is where two or three people are gathered in Jesus' name.

### *Paul's vision*

So, what does be an off-site church mean for our congregation, for any congregation? Many churches will experience a slow return to traditional Sunday service, fewer numbers, and off-site church may even become the new normal. In the past two years, there were moments of joy and moments of sadness. We missed each other, but we also learned an awful lot about each other. Some people felt excluded, some people felt more included than before. What lessons can we draw from it? What changes do we want to embrace permanently? Do we want to return to the old ways, or adopt the new ways, too?

As the Apostles were figuring out their next steps, Paul had a vision. During the night there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Paul and the Apostles didn't hesitate one minute. They immediately went on their way.

What did they find as they walked away from the closed doors and through the door that had opened for them?

Here is how the story continues:

The Apostles set sail from Troas and went to Philippi in Macedonia, a Roman colony. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river to pray; and they sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to them; she was a tradeswoman. God opened her heart to listen to what was said by Paul, and she and her household were baptized and invited the Apostles to stay at her house.

In Asia and Bithynia, the doors were shut, but in Philippi, Paul and the Apostles found open doors and open hearts to grow their small community.

I would like to know from you: what doors have opened for you when the doors of our church were shut? Send me an email or text message, and I will share it in the next audio service, and we can discover all the doors that have been opened to us during our time as an off-site church.

May God open new doors for you every day, and give you the strength and courage to walk through them.

Amen

### **Announcements**

The next service will take place on 7 November at 11am. We will mark reformation day and, also, have a baptism. There will be an opportunity to light your baptism candle in the service if you would like to bring it along.

The next audio service will be on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November.

We appreciate your donations. You can find the button for online donations and bank details on our webpage, or send a cheque to the Swiss Church office. Thank you very much for everything you can give!

### **Prayers of Intercession**

God of Freedom,

We pray for those who are trapped behind doors. We pray for those for whom shut doors are not a shelter, but signify violence and abuse. We pray for those who feel isolated and lonely in a city of closed doors. We pray for those who are imprisoned by fear and held captive. Through your dying and rising, set us free.

*Kyrie eleison*

Living God,

Thank you for the awesome variety of creation, the breath-taking diversity of life on earth. Teach us to appreciate both the privilege and the responsibility it represents, not only rejoicing at all you have given but also respect its innate worth and dignity and playing our part in protecting it for the future.

*Kyrie Eleison*

Gracious God,

Thank you for the relationship we enjoy with you – your faithfulness across the years, your enduring love, your companionship through the journey of life – and forgive us that all too often it has been one-sided, you having to do all the running. Renew our commitment. Teach us to choose our doors wisely and to accept when certain doors are closed for us however much we wish they were open. Help us to seek fulfilment in love and forgiveness.

*Kyrie Eleison*

In a moment of silence, let us keep in prayer those around us who need it most.

### *Silence*

All our prayers we command into God's hands as we pray together with the words that Jesus has taught us, each in their own language.

### **Lord's Prayer**

#### **Blessing**

"May your days be many, and your troubles be few. May all God's blessings descend upon you. May peace be within you; may your heart be strong. May you find what you're seeking wherever you roam."

God bless you and keep you; God make her face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; God lift up her countenance upon you and give you peace.

Que le Seigneur te bénisse et te garde! Que le Seigneur fasse briller sur toi son visage, qu'il se penche vers toi! Que le Seigneur tourne vers toi son visage, qu'il t'apporte la paix!

Gott segne dich und behüte dich; Gott lasse das Angesicht leuchten über dir und sei dir gnädig; Gott hebe sein Angesicht über dich und gebe dir Frieden.

Amen

#### **Sending**

Gönd in Friede, und bringet de Fride i d'Wält. Go in peace, and bring peace tot he world.