

Funeral sermon for Joseph Paglia 2/10/21

It is likely that most of us have seen the classic motion picture, "The Wizard of Oz". It is arguably one of the finest movies ever made, and, remarkably, it was first released for public viewing eighty two years ago! The story is all too familiar: Dorothy and her three fellow companions journey to the Emerald City of Oz, hoping to see the all-powerful Wizard. For young Dorothy the Wizard is her only chance of returning to her beloved Kansas farm. Having arrived in Oz, the four now stand in front of a massive, green door, studded with emeralds. Dorothy knocks on the door, only to be met by the rattled doorkeeper, the guardian of the realm, who shows them little respect. In order to see the Wizard they must pass through the doorway. The door must be opened!

The first lesson learned by the four is that to be given access to the mighty Wizard is no sure thing. Entering into his presence is a rare privilege only granted to a few.

In the four gospels there are many references to doors and gates. There are locked doors, bolted doors, open doors and even narrow gates. In Christ's Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Enter through the narrow gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it but small is the gate, and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the unprepared foolish women are barred entry to the wedding feast, a symbol of heaven. They are locked out.

In another parable, a father initially refuses to leave his bed and assist a stranger in need. He says, "Do not trouble me. The door is now shut and my children are with me in bed".

In the tenth chapter of John's gospel, Jesus says, "I am the door (or gate)". Through Jesus, his disciples enter into eternal life and are given access to the Father's house. At the moment of death the doors fly open and the elect enter. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus. No one!

At the hour of death, a Christian knocks on heaven's door.

In 1996, a Scottish musician, Ted Christopher, made a request of the legendary songwriter, Bob Dylan, to add a verse to one of his most popular songs, "Knockin' on Heaven's Door". He wanted to honor the memory of the schoolchildren and one of their teachers who had been killed by a crazed gunman. Dylan gladly consented. Christopher also wanted to restore hope to the badly shaken people of Dunblane where the massacre occurred.

Death is not the end of the story. There is a sequel. For the Christian, life is changed, not ended. Death is a door, a magic door. The world into which a door opens is the world of the supernatural, the world of God.

As we take leave of our brother, Jake, let us ponder the words from the Book of Revelation, the last book of the bible. "I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have kept my word and not denied my name".

May God have mercy on his immortal soul, and may we be reunited with him in the House of the Heavenly Father!