

I Stand by the Door - by Sam Shoemaker

I stand by the door.

I neither go too far in, nor stay too far out,

The door is the most important door in the world-

It is the door through which people walk when they find God.

There's no use my going way inside, and staying there,

When so many are still outside and they, as much as I,

Crave to know where the door is.

And all that so many ever find

Is only the wall where a door ought to be.

They creep along the wall like blind people,

With outstretched, groping hands.

Feeling for a door, knowing there must be a door,

Yet they never find it ...

So I stand by the door.

The most tremendous thing in the world

Is for people to find that door--the door to God.

The most important thing any person can do

Is to take hold of one of those blind, groping hands,

And put it on the latch--the latch that only clicks

And opens to the person's own touch.

People die outside that door, as starving beggars die

On cold nights in cruel cities in the dead of winter—

Die for want of what is within their grasp.

They live, on the other side of it--live because they have not found it.

Nothing else matters compared to helping them find it,

And open it, and walk in, and find Him ...

So I stand by the door.

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*Go in, great saints, go all the way in--
Go way down into the cavernous cellars,
And way up into the spacious attics--
It is a vast roomy house, this house where God is.
Go into the deepest of hidden casements,
Of withdrawal, of silence, of sainthood.
Some must inhabit those inner rooms.
And know the depths and heights of God,
And call outside to the rest of us how wonderful it is.
Sometimes I take a deeper look in,
Sometimes venture in a little farther;
But my place seems closer to the opening ...
So I stand by the door.*

*There is another reason why I stand there.
Some people get part way in and become afraid
Lest God and the zeal of His house devour them
For God is so very great, and asks all of us.
And these people feel a cosmic claustrophobia,
And want to get out. "Let me out!" they cry,
And the people way inside only terrify them more.
Somebody must be by the door to tell them that they are spoiled
For the old life, they have seen too much:
Once taste God, and nothing but God will do any more.
Somebody must be watching for the frightened
Who seek to sneak out just where they came in,*

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To tell them how much better it is inside.

The people too far in do not see how near these are

To leaving--preoccupied with the wonder of it all.

Somebody must watch for those who have entered the door,

But would like to run away. So for them, too,

I stand by the door.

I admire the people who go way in.

But I wish they would not forget how it was

Before they got in. Then they would be able to help

The people who have not, yet even found the door,

Or the people who want to run away again from God,

You can go in too deeply, and stay in too long,

And forget the people outside the door.

As for me, I shall take my old accustomed place,

Near enough to God to hear Him, and know He is there,

But not so far from people as not to hear them,

And remember they are there, too.

Where? Outside the door--

Thousands of them, millions of them.

But--more important for me--

One of them, two of them, ten of them,

Whose hands I am intended to put on the latch.

So I shall stand by the door and wait

For those who seek it.

"I had rather be a door-keeper ..."

So I stand by the door.

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Sam Shoemaker, founder of Faith At Work at Calvary Episcopal Church in New York City, in 1926, was also one of the spiritual leaders who helped draft the 12 Steps of A.A.