

I STAND BY THE DOOR: AN APOLOGIA FOR MY LIFE

by The Rev. Samuel Moor Shoemaker, 12th Rector of Calvary Episcopal Church

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 men 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 a wall where a door ought to be.
They creep along the wall like blind men,
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 men to find that door-the door to God.
The most important thing any man 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
And opens to that man's own touch.
Men 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.

To 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 that 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 further;
But my place seems closer to the opening...
So I stand by the door.

There is another reason why I stand there.
Some 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 of 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 watching for the frightened
Who seek to sneak out just where they came in,
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 wouldn't forget how it was
Before they got in. Then they would be able to help
The people who have not yet found the door,
Or the people who want to run away again from God.
You can in too far 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 and hear Him,
 and know He is there,
But not so far from men 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 doorkeeper..."
So I stand by the door.