

**Series: For All the Saints**  
**Sermon: Corrie Ten Boom**

**Revelation 3:7-8, 11**

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. 8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

**Sermon**

What are the odds? Wayne Straight and I share the same birthday, August 9<sup>th</sup>, albeit 40 years apart. I was born on his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. But my actual due date was in the first week of September. The night before I was born, the horses got out of their pen when they freaked out in a thunderstorm - my mother, 8 months pregnant, went off into the dark midnight rain to bring them back in. 12 hours later, I was born. But without working lungs. Off I went into the incubator without my parents being able to touch or hold me. That afternoon, the doc shared to my folks that I had about a 50/50 chance. If I made through the night, I'd probably make it. And they had the choice of rubbing me with gloves through the glass, or just wait to hear back from the nurses if I was still around. They chose to rub my back. In case you're curious, I pulled through. This little family story of ours does give me pause, though, and makes me appreciate a little more about being here. Not just here, but HERE. Alive. And well. Is there a cosmic plan at work? I don't know - that gets a little too out there for me, but I am grateful to be breathing here today, and I do wonder, is there something I'm supposed to do, or how to live my life in appreciation of making thus far. I was in the car the other day with one of my kiddos. I won't say his name, but it wasn't Christian or Samantha. And we were talking about colleges. And how his mother almost didn't go to the college that she did, where I went to college, and if that happened, we wouldn't have met, or fell in love, or gotten married...and consequently, he wouldn't be here either. So aren't you lucky that we met! He responded, “yeah, but mom might have met someone way cooler and he would have been my dad.” “I don't think you know how this works...” Many of you have shared stories of times that you beat the odds in whatever way, or had a momentary flash of insight that gave you a profound sense of appreciation and gratitude of being alive. Fully alive. I have spoken with veterans who have reflected on how they made it out of the not-so-proverbial foxhole, when their buddy did not. Or made it through the charge, when the one on the left and the right fell. God bless our veterans - in whatever capacity they served - for we cannot fully comprehend what the moniker Veteran truly means - unless you've been there. The veterans in my family, especially those who have seen action, sometimes struggle with being one of the ones who made it out - and how to move forward in thankfulness, and yet, with a sense of obligation to fully live in honor of those who did not.

Not all people who fight in wars carry guns. This morning's saint is one of them. Corrie Ten Boom was the youngest daughter of a working class watchmaker and his wife in Amsterdam. Born in 1892, she was a young woman during World War I, but her country was one that stayed out of that conflict. Her mother died in 1921, having a stroke while peeling potatoes in the kitchen. Corrie wanted a little more of the world than her mom. She trained to be a watchmaker herself, and in 1922, she became the first woman to be licensed as a watchmaker in the Netherlands. Over the next decade, in addition to working in her father's shop, she established a youth club for teenage girls, which provided religious instruction and classes in the performing arts, sewing, and

handicrafts. She and her family were Calvinist Christians in the Dutch Reformed Church, and their faith inspired them to serve their society, which they did by offering shelter, food and money to those who were in need.

In May 1940, the German Blitzkrieg ran through the Netherlands and the other Low Countries. Within months, the "Nazification" of the Dutch people began and the quiet life of the ten Boom family was changed forever. During the war, their house became a refuge for Jews, students and intellectuals. The facade of the watch shop made the house an ideal front for these activities. A secret room, no larger than a small wardrobe closet, was built into Corrie's bedroom behind a false wall. The space could hold up to six people, all of whom had to stand quiet and still. A crude ventilation system was installed to provide air for the occupants. When security sweeps came through the neighborhood, a buzzer in the house would signal danger, allowing the refugees a little over a minute to seek sanctuary in the hiding place. This was like the underground railroad, a part of the Dutch Resistance that smuggled those in danger out of the country. Over 800 people found their freedom through her bedroom. Wartime shortages meant that food was scarce. Every non-Jewish Dutch person had received a ration card, the requirement for obtaining weekly food coupons. Through her charitable work and youth clubs (that were now illegal), ten Boom knew many people and she remembered a family with a disabled daughter, whose father was a civil servant who was now in charge of the local ration-card office. She went to his house one evening, and when he asked how many ration cards she needed. "I opened my mouth to say, 'Five,'" ten Boom wrote later, "But the number that unexpectedly and astonishingly came out instead was: 'One hundred.'" He gave them to her and she provided cards to every Jew she met.

It was not to last. Their house was raided in February 1944. They were able to hide whom they could in the safe room, but the family was out of luck. And off they went to the Concentration Camps. The family was separated. In the closed boxcar that took Corrie and her sister on a three day journey from the coast to deep inside Germany, her sister uttered, "Corrie, we are in hell". They made it to Ravensbruck Extermination Camp. Corrie was able to sneak in a Bible in a small pouch that hung from her neck. Even up to this point, it would have been easy to lose faith. They had been sold out. They had been slapped, and shoved and snatched by interrogating soldiers. Once at Ravensbruck, she had weeks of solitary confinement. Rancid food. She learned of her father's death. Forced labor. And all around, death. Yet even in the midst of such hate and evil, there was always, somehow, God's good news. A sympathetic nurse secretly slipped her soap one day. Some safety pins. Someone else slipped her little books, the Gospels, that she would also give out to those who needed to hear the Good News - for there was none around them. In the night, when the guards couldn't have cared less or thought the women were gossiping in their native tongue, small groups of woman gathered in Bible study and prayer. In the horror of the Holocaust, even God's truth was prevailing, and the gates of hell could not resist it. She would later write, "Faith is like radar that sees through the fog, the reality of things at a distance that the human eye cannot see." Her sister did not live through these days. And neither should have Corrie. It was New Years Eve and a clerical error had been made, a mistake as those in power were hurrying to get ready for the new year. She was told, surprisingly and mistakenly, that she was to be freed. Now. What were the odds? And a guard led her to the front gate. There was no one there to meet her - they just let her out. She said, "Behind me I heard the hinges squeak as the gate swung shut. I was free! And flooding through my mind were the words of Jesus to the church at Philadelphia: 'Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.'" She ran. That week, all of the women her age and older in the camp were gassed and burned.

She made it home to the Netherlands. The Allies had just liberated her country. And she opened a rehabilitation home for the handicapped and ex prisoners of concentration camps. She also opened up her doors to some Dutch citizens who helped the Nazis, and now feared for their life. A few years after the war, she returned to Germany and the camp, and met two guards who she remembered, and who she remembered who were cruel to her dead sister. And she forgave them. She raised money and purchased another former concentration camp and used it as a place to help those who were displaced and disabled in the war. A place of

healing and peace.

Corrie ten Boom traveled the world and ministered in more than 60 countries. Recognized by Israel with the award, "Righteous Among the Nations", given to non-jews who helped the Chosen people during the Holocaust. She was a prolific writer, including *The Hiding Place*, that became a 1975 movie. By that time, a stroke had taken her speech. But, she was able to watch the final scene as they filmed. The doors of the concentration camp swung open, the actress playing her character joined a handful of others emerging from the walls of death. And she wept. The door was open, yes, but it hurt to see it again from this side, looking at all the agony and loss that lay behind it. Her friend and assistant placed her arm around Corrie and whispered in her ear, "God has given you an open door. No one has been able to shut it." Not even the devil in hell.

It is a miracle that she made it. And had done all the good since her freedom. And I want to tell you - it is a miracle that you are here as well. Not just here, but HERE. What were the odds that your parents would have met? Or their parents? Or their parents? Exponentially back. Or even that they would have conceived you when they did. If it was another egg or another swimming guy, you'd be different. What were the odds? It starts to be mind bogglingly insane that the odds of you being here today because they are statistically zero. I once heard it said that imagine you have a small ring in your hand, and there is one turtle swimming in the whole of the ocean, and sometime in the next 100 years it will pop its head out of the water just once for one second (I know it needs air, but go with me on this), and you with your ring have to decide beforehand what second in that century and what precise location in all of the ocean to throw that ring to go around that turtle's neck. Those odds are far better than the odds that you are here today. Wow.

And so I remind you and myself today. Be grateful and thankful that you are here and HERE. And what will you do with the time that you have? Corrie once said, "If the devil cannot make us bad, he will make us busy." Too busy to love. Too busy to be kind. Too busy to care. I know we don't see it, but every day we wake up we have an open door! You may have little strength - but we believe in a God of strength. We may have little faith, but we believe in a God that has faith in you. We may think the world is full of evil, but if a middle aged watchmaker can bring a little light into the world, imagine what we could do. And the family of God said, AMEN!

#### Corrie ten Boom Quotes

"You can never learn that Christ is all you need, until Christ is all you have."

"Do you know what hurts so very much? It's love. Love is the strongest force in the world, and when it is blocked that means pain. There are two things we can do when this happens. We can kill that love so that it stops hurting. But then of course part of us dies, too. Or we can ask God to open up another route for that love to travel."

"And our wise Father in heaven knows when we're going to need things too. Don't run out ahead of him."

"Love is larger than the walls which shut it in."

"You will find it is necessary to let things go, simply for the reason that they are too heavy."

"Don't bother to give God instructions, just report for duty."

"You can never learn that Christ is all you need, until Christ is all you have."

“God takes our sins – the past, present, and future, and dumps them in the sea and puts up a sign that says NO FISHING ALLOWED.”

“Hold everything in your hands lightly, otherwise it hurts when God pries your fingers open.”

“If you look at the world, you’ll be distressed. If you look within, you’ll be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you’ll be at rest.”

“The measure of a life, after all, is not its duration, but its donation.”

“There is no pit so deep, that God’s love is not deeper still.”

"If God sends us on stony paths, he provides strong shoes."

"Worry is like a rocking chair: it keeps you moving but doesn't get you anywhere."

"Faith sees the invisible, believes the unbelievable, and receives the impossible."

“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”

“Let God's promises shine on your problems.”

“Worry is a cycle of inefficient thoughts whirling around a center of fear.”

“Now, I know in my experience that Jesus’ light is stronger than the biggest darkness.”

“Any concern too small to be turned into a prayer is too small to be made into a burden.”