

The Invitation

by Doreen Tamminga

A large group of people stand gathered at the door of a great stone castle. Their feet shuffle on the ground raising dust, just as their voices are raised to be heard over all the noise. Young and old are gathered there; women and children are seen among the men and grey-headed. They have come from far, from all over the countryside. What has brought them here?

A stranger has visited their country, and told them of a great Prince who has invited them to his castle. The stranger also told them the way to the castle. And the people? What did they do with the stranger's message? Many of them went to find out if his invitation was true, but many more stayed home; they were too busy, tired, lazy, or didn't believe his message. But the people who listened began the journey to the castle. In each mind was the question: what will I have to do to be allowed in to see the Prince?

And so here is this great commotion of people, gathered before the door of the Prince's castle. They seem to be arguing. Come closer, and you can hear what they are saying. Listen to the group of men standing closest to the heavy iron door.

"How can that be?" one man asks, pointing up to some words carved in stone above the great door.

Look up, and you can read the words too.

KNOCK AND THE DOOR SHALL BE
OPENED UNTO YOU

"Why would the Prince open the door if we knocked?" the man asks. "We're only peasants – the poor people from our country."

"That's right," his neighbour agrees. "Besides, how could the Prince even hear us? He's probably busy inside."

A few feet away stand some mothers busy with their children. "I'm hot, Mother," a little boy complains. "May we leave soon?"

"Hush, child," his mother replies. "Soon. Father said it is important that we come, but soon we can leave."

A small baby starts to cry, and its mother bounces it gently, trying to calm her child. The father is looking thoughtfully up at the words above the door.

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"Hmm," he says to himself. "So there really is a castle, and we really do have a Prince. It's good to know that. Maybe we'll come back some day when we have more time. Come along, children," he calls, and his family follows him down the path, away from the castle.

An old man and woman slowly edge their way through the crowd up to the great doors. With dim eyes they carefully make out the words carved in the stone. "Knock!" the old man says surprised. "Is that all, wife? There must be some mistake. It cannot be so easy." Helpfully he tucks his wife's arm through his, and arm in arm they shuffle away.

"Besides," he adds with one last look at the castle. "What would we do in the castle anyways? We're old. It's better for us to go back to our home."

A group of boys are standing to the side of the door, talking about the words. "You go," one boy says pushing his friend. "You go first, then we'll follow."

"I'm not going," he protests. "Everyone's watching. No way."

"Look!" another of the boys exclaims. "There's some trees growing up against the castle wall. Let's see if we can climb them and get over the wall!"

"You won't make it," the first boy replies. "They're not tall enough."

"Who cares? Let's just try it," his friend answers, and off they scamper to the trees.

Suddenly a man comes forward out of the crowd. The people step aside to let him through. He is dressed more neatly than the other poor peasants. He walks boldly up to the doors, frowns up at the words, then putting both hands to the door handle, pulls at the great door. But nothing happens.

"Pah!" the man scowls and spits in the dirt. In injured pride he turns and hurries away down the path.

Over to the side we can see two other men, busy with a piece of iron. They are prying at the hinges, seeing if the door can be opened that way. But they too, cannot force the door open.

Coming up along the side of the crowd is a young man and woman. They have carefully prepared themselves to meet the Prince. You can see that their hair and clothing is neat, in their hand is a gift for the Prince, and they have prepared a beautiful speech to read to the Prince.

"Where is the servant that keeps the door?" the young man asks when he gets to the door.

"I don't see any servant," the young woman answers him. "It says we must knock."

"What? No servants?" the young man exclaims in disgust. "What kind of a Prince and castle is this? Let us leave this place at once." And with that, he and the young woman turn away.

And so it goes. Some are curious about the words, some wonder if they are really true. Some are in too much of a hurry to stay long. Some wonder if there is a way to get in without knocking. Some are trying to make themselves ready to see the Prince. And some are too embarrassed to go forward and knock.

Then the sky grows dark. Heavy grey clouds cover the sun. Rain begins to fall, first

in drops, and then in great sheets of water. The people try to shield their faces from the rain. Many peasants, bothered by the rain and disappointed with the words they saw above the gate, turn away and hurry back down the path to find shelter.

But do they all leave? No, a few stay behind, squinting longingly up at the words carved in stone. We will stay also, for look! Over there. A small figure comes hurrying up the path. It is a young girl, her clothes soaked through by the rain, and water streaming out of her shoes.

“Am I too late?” she asks, out of breath. But no one answers. They turn and look silently from the words down to the girl. “What is it?” she asks once more. “Will the Prince not let us in after all? What must we do to come to him?”

In answer, an old man points slowly up at the words carved above the door.

KNOCK AND THE DOOR SHALL BE OPENED UNTO YOU

“Is that the way?” the girl cries. “Then I am not too late after all!” And with that she hurries to the great door, raises her small hand and knocks. The others look in wonder as the great door to the castle swings open and then closes as the girl disappears inside.

Jesus spoke these words about coming to Him, the Prince of Peace: “Knock and it shall be opened unto you.” He also said, “Seek and ye shall find; ask and it shall be given unto you.” What has been your response?

ASK, AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN YOU;
SEEK, AND YE SHALL FIND;
KNOCK, AND IT SHALL BE OPENED UNTO
YOU.

MATTHEW 7:7

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