

Sermon      August 21, 2022      11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost      Luke 13:22-30

He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, 24 “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ 26 Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ 27 But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ 28 In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. 29 And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. 30 And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

Luke 13:22-30

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we read about some people who had an important question to ask Jesus. (At least it was an important question in their minds.)

**“Lord, will those who are saved be few?”**

Perhaps you have asked this same question. I know I have. What about all those people in such and such a country. They are all so nice. They don’t believe in Jesus as savior from death and hell. Will they go to heaven? I know some who have asked that question and didn’t like the answer given, so they themselves left the faith. Now we wonder about what will happen to them.

When I am asked about the eternal fate of who, as best as we can tell, are non-believers, my answer is direct and simple. We commend them to the grace of God. We still want to reach them with the message of repentance. Yet we still commend them to the Lord. And pray for them. But it doesn’t matter so much

what I say about all this. What matters is what Jesus, God-in-the-flesh has to say. His answer?

**“Strive to enter through the narrow door.”**

What kind of answer is that? Jesus didn't answer the question at all. He didn't answer the question because it's not the most important one. The most important question from Jesus' point of view isn't what will happen to others. The most important question to ask is what will happen to *you*? So Jesus answers us with the directive to worry about ourselves. Our own condition. Our own situation. Our own fate. What good is it worrying about others if we ourselves miss the mark and forfeit the prize? Hopefully we can see the logic and wisdom in Jesus' words. Jesus says it is his desire and will for us to enter heaven through the narrow door.

A narrow door means that it is hard to get through. I always thought that if I ever built a house I would make all the doors extra wide. If an ailing parent or child in a wheelchair or something were to move in with me, they could get through the house much easier. Perhaps one day the person in the wheel chair might be me. Wider doors are easier to get through. Jesus says the door to heaven is narrow. It is not easy to get through. It is hard to pass through a narrow door.

Why is the door to heaven narrow? One might think if God is so loving and all, he would not make the door narrow, but extra wide like that house I would build. Extra wide so as many as possible could pass through it and on into the heavenly realm. I think that God actually did make the door extra wide. The problem is that the door isn't one that people typically want to go through. Therein lies the problem.

The problem Jesus addresses is that we all naturally try to build our own door. Good people go to heaven. Evil people go elsewhere. With this thinking, the solution to getting to heaven is simple: be a good person. So we either make conscious attempts to be good people, or we take a look at our lives and self-judge ourselves to be good. It makes absolute sense from a human point of view.

To such an approach Jesus gives a resounding, “Nonsense!” Jesus took a lot of time a few weeks ago in the reading to remind and reassure us that he is the one

who provides us with everything we need for this life. He takes that idea forward and today reminds and reassures us he is also the one who provides the way to the next life. If you fly over 10,000 feet in altitude, you must either be in a pressurized cabin or have one of those oxygen masks the fighter pilots wear. Without such assistance, you will die. If we seek to approach the heights of heaven, we also need assistance, or we will die.

Heaven is a holy place. It's the holiest of places. We are not holy. We see this on a typical trip to the food pantry to feed the poor. Feeding the poor is a good thing. Jesus is in favor and teaches us to help the poor. However, on the way to the food pantry, one person in the car yells at the driver for going so slow they will be late. Another one is upset someone else forgot to get mayo to make the sandwiches. A third is freaking out because no one else is wearing a mask. You get the picture. Even our good works come tainted with sin. There is no room whatsoever for sin in such a holy place as heaven. We would not want someone to walk into our house with muddy boots. It's easy to understand why holy God wouldn't allow us to track our sin into his holy realm! Logically, we have no hope and a zero chance of dragging our muddy boots into heaven. Jesus tells us not to even try.

So what does Jesus mean when he tells us to strive to enter the narrow door? He means that we should strive NOT to do what comes naturally. We should strive NOT to try and make ourselves worthy of God's blessing. We should strive NOT to think of ourselves as people fit for the heavenly realms. However, we SHOULD strive to give up such attempts at self-justification and we SHOULD strive to only trust in Jesus' saving work and his promise to get us there.

**I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. John 10:9**

Jesus does not just tell us to strive to enter heaven through the narrow door. Here he tells us that HE IS that door through which we enter paradise! How does this work? How can Jesus be the door to heaven? Unlike us, Jesus Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit, was without sin. He lived a morally perfect life. Since he lived a perfect life, he was not under any condemnation. Therefore, Jesus was able to be our stand-in. He stood in our place. He took upon himself the suffering that belonged to us. He died the death that was ours. On the third day he rose again.

Alive from the grave, he now shares his work of salvation with us. By his life we will live forever.

Jesus is the narrow door. To enter through him, we must strip ourselves of anything of our own we might have claimed worthy to gain us entry. We empty ourselves of any attempts at God's favor and wholly and only trust in Jesus for eternal life with him.

There is a banquet feast being prepared in eternity. Guess who is the host? It's Jesus. As we enter through the narrow door, he is waiting there for us to welcome us to his table. He even sends his welcome today. As we eat the food of heaven from this table in church, we begin to celebrate the everlasting gifts of blessing in Jesus Christ. This is the marriage feast of the Lamb in his kingdom that he has won for us.

God's will is that we enter through the narrow door which is Jesus. It is hard. It is just as Jesus says – a struggle. It isn't easy to come to terms with the truth there is nothing in us that would make us worthy of heaven. It is humiliating to be so completely dependent on someone else. That is why the door is so narrow.

Will many pass through the narrow door and be saved? Jesus says don't be concerned about other people. Look to yourself and at least make sure you enter. Repent. Cling to Jesus' cross. And be sure to share the message of the saving life and love of Jesus Christ that others might hear the truth, believe, and enter through Jesus the narrow door into the eternal, blessed life with God and all who call upon the name of the Lord and are saved.

**The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him.  
Amen.**

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