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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 16C)

August 21, 2016

Text: Luke 13:22–30

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

According to today's gospel reading from Luke 13:22–30, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. Along the way, someone asks Jesus a rather difficult question, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" (vs. 23). It's a great question, and a hard one at that. In Luke 18:8, Jesus asks the same thing but a bit differently, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" People are still asking these important questions today in one way or another.

Jesus' answer to the question, "...will those who are saved be few?" is found in vs. 24, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." It's a startling answer.

The first thing I want you to notice is that Jesus changes the entire mode of discuss. Grammatically speaking, the question was asked in the third person, will those people out there be saved. It's a rather detached, analytic way of asking the question. Grammatically speaking, Jesus changes the conversation to the second person, "I tell *you*...strive to enter through the narrow door." Our Lord makes it personal. His answer not affects those folks out there but it affects YOU! So you'd better listen and pay attention for I talking to you about you, says Jesus.

Entrance for you into God's kingdom is possible only through a single, narrow door; there are not multiple ways into God's kingdom. Jesus alone, is the door into God's kingdom. And you mustn't overlook the fact that Luke mentioned that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem in vs. 22. Through our dear Lord's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to the Father's right hand, the single, narrow door to heaven is opened. There is no other way. All other paths, no matter how pious, how religious, how rigorous, how full of good works and rituals and disciplines, run into the brick wall of condemnation. You and all who are being saved cling to Jesus and what He did in Jerusalem. That narrow-door faith is so comprehensive that it affects every aspect of life: home, family, recreation, our hopes and dreams. Everything is done in faith in Jesus; He's the door.

Jesus says you are to “strive to enter through the narrow door” (vs. 24). The word that Jesus uses for “strive” describes the effort exerted in athletic and military contests. This is a rigorous, disciplined, purposeful effort. You don’t just slip into Christ’s kingdom by accident. The way of salvation is narrow, singular, and demands much striving. What better description of Good Friday and Easter can be made?

That is, in fact, the path you were baptized into. You died with Christ and rose again to live in newness of life the moment baptismal waters touched your body. The striving begins at baptism and continues throughout all of life. For your life, dear Christian, is one of repentance – dying to your old, sinful self and ways – and faith, that is, rising again each and every day to live in the Spirit-filled resurrection power of Christ’s gospel. The striving you are called to undertake is not one of self-chosen works, no matter how impressive they may seem, but rather one of daily repentance and faith, the life-long living out of your baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Today’s epistle reading from Hebrews 12 gives a vivid and powerful description of the striving you and me are to exert in our daily life of faith. The inspired author is writing to baptized Christians gathered in Christ’s name to worship the Lord by hear His Word and receiving Holy Supper. These words now describe your striving as Christians to enter the narrow door that Jesus opened for us unto eternal life; this is your baptismal life of faith and obedience:

<sup>4</sup>In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup>And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. <sup>6</sup>For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” (*Prov. 3:11–12*) <sup>7</sup>It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup>If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup>Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup>For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. <sup>11</sup>For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. <sup>12</sup>Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, <sup>13</sup>and make straight paths for

your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. <sup>14</sup>Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. <sup>15</sup>See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; <sup>16</sup>that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. <sup>17</sup>For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

The writer to the Hebrews is exhorting believers like you and me to live out their most holy faith in a manner that is worthy of the Lord Jesus. Yes, saving faith can die if it is not nourished by the on-going, life-giving power of Christ’s Gospel received in faith and trust.

Listen to the warning that Jesus gives in vs. 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.’” Once the door is shut, the opportunity for entrance is forever closed. The door is shut either at death or when the Lord returns. When the door is shut, either you have already entered the door through faith in Jesus or it is closed forever.

For many, the closing of the narrow door will create shock and confusion. Excuses will abound, “We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets” (vs. 26). Those who are locked out wrongly believed that they were one of the saved ones because they heard Jesus’ preaching and teaching and maybe even ate and drank at the Lord’s Supper. But the hearing, eating, and drinking were not mixed with repentance and faith. They did not know Jesus even though they heard His Word and dwelt in His presence.

In my judgment, the most terrifying words in all of Scripture are those spoken by the Lord Jesus, twice in today’s text for emphasis, “I do not know where you come from” (vs. 25, 27). To know about Jesus intellectually is insufficient. There must be faith and a relationship of trust and love. Everyone who merely knows about Jesus but does not know Him as Lord and Redeemer will not enter the narrow door. For Jesus Himself says that He does not know them as His redeemed children. They will be forever shut out of God’s kingdom. And Jesus says, “In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth...” (vs. 28).

So what is Jesus' answer to the question of how many will be saved? If we answer the question according to the Law – that is, what we do to earn our salvation – then the answer is no one. The door is too narrow, the striving too extreme. God's Law demands perfect obedience. Jesus said, "many will seek to enter and will not be able" in vs. 24 and then in vs. 28, "you yourselves (are) cast out."

If we answer the question according to the Gospel – that is, what Jesus did in His life, death, and resurrection to save the world – then the answer is, many, many will be saved and enter the narrow door. Listen to how Jesus describes it in vs. 29, "And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God." From every corner of the earth, people will hear and believe the Gospel. They will be baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus and live out their lives in continual faith and obedience. The narrow door suits them just fine for the door is Christ Himself, the very center of their love and devotion. And they will feast at Christ's table of salvation for all eternity.

But there is one more shocking truth Jesus teaches regarding the narrow way of salvation. You and I must not be deceived by outward appearances. Jesus says, "And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last" (vs. 30). Many whom we think should be believers may not be. Many whom we don't think are Christians, may in fact, be. Jesus knows for sure.

What is given to you and me and all Christians is the gift of faith and salvation. In Christ alone and by Christ alone, we baptized Christians live out our daily lives of faith and obedience by means of daily repentance (striving against sin and turning from it) and daily faith (steadfast trust and confidence in Jesus to provide all they we need for life in the world and the world to come).

Will those who are saved be few? Jesus changes the question to "will you be saved and enter the narrow door?" The Lord also gives the answer. Yes, through My death and resurrection you are being saved. So strive to enter that salvation by receiving Me in faith. Look to Me alone, says Jesus. And you will join Me and all the faithful from east and west, and from north and south who feast in the God's kingdom.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.