

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost /August 25, 2019  
Luke 13:22-30/The Narrow Door  
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church  
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“Strive to enter through the narrow door.”

This is the opening declaration of the parable Jesus told about the narrow door as He was going to Jerusalem to strive for us on the cross. He would strive on the cross to become the door so that we could pass through him into eternal life. As Jesus said about himself, [John 14:6] “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” So, in today’s Gospel, we hear the parable of the door from the Door.

The idea that the essence of a person continues on after death is fairly common in this world. Most people believe in some sort of an afterlife. They believe there is a time of judgment after death. The differences between beliefs start to show up in the details of judgment as well as the resulting penalties and rewards.

Human belief covers a wide spectrum, some believe if you don’t “get it right” in your first lifetime, you keep coming back time and again until you do. Others simply say good people go to some sort of paradise and bad people go to some sort of punishment. Some people, who can’t stand the idea of eternal punishment, think evil people simply cease to be.

When Jesus taught about life after death, He made it very clear there were two and only two destinations. He described one destination as a great heavenly party. He compared this place to a wedding reception, the celebration of the coronation of a king and a great banquet. He described the other destination as a place of eternal torment. He talked of fires that never go out, worms that never die,

and utter darkness. Today Jesus spoke of those who recline at table in the kingdom of God and those who enter the kingdom of darkness. Jesus makes it very clear, there is a hell to be avoided and a heaven to be desired.

The next question is very logical. How can I be sure I am in the Kingdom of God? How can I be sure I will spend eternity with Jesus? Jesus replied, "Strive to enter through the narrow door." The door is narrow because there is only one way to God, Christ alone. Our culture tells us there are many doors into the Kingdom of God, but Jesus tells us otherwise.

The saddest part of the parable is there are many who wait outside the door and even ignore it. They follow the example of the people in Noah's day. As the door of the ark closed and the water started collecting around, they suddenly realized they needed to be inside! So also, people waiting at the door to the Kingdom watch the door close and suddenly realize they need to be inside too. In terror they pound on the door, but the master will not let them in. Can you imagine the terror of the people in Noah's day as they pounded on the ark until the water rose and lifted them off their feet and swept them away to a certain death? How much more is the terror of these people standing outside the narrow door as they realize that they are doomed to an eternity in hell?

The sad tragedy is they were warned. The people themselves say, "We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets." Here are people who were baptized but rejected the faith. Ones who passed confirmation instruction but didn't take it to heart. Here are people who hear the Word of God proclaimed accurately but resist it. Here are people who eat and drink the true body and blood of Jesus Christ Himself, but think it is only a quaint tradition and therefore do it to their eternal destruction.

Then there are those people who “Strive to enter through the narrow door.” The Greek word for strive is the root for the English word agony. It indicates a struggle, an ordeal, something that takes effort. In fact, this door is impossible for us in our natural state. These are people who convicted of their sins through the power of the Holy Spirit and struggle in repentance over those sins. They are people whose sins were washed away by the blood of the lamb and brought to saving faith in Jesus. These are people who did not rely on their own works to save them, but, by the power of the Holy Spirit, placed all their trust in Jesus Christ. These are the people who recline at the table in the kingdom of God.

Some of these people will be a surprise. For Jesus said, “And behold, some are last who will be first...” There will be the thief on the cross who knew nothing about the Gospel until he came to his end and God in the flesh was hanging on the cross next to him. There will be Paul who persecuted the church until Christ met him on the road to Damascus. There will be that prisoner who was nothing but trouble, but whom Christ met when a volunteer brought the Gospel to him in jail.

Unfortunately, there will be tragedies as well. For Jesus said, “...and some are first who will be last.” These tragedies will include the Jewish leaders who heard Moses and the prophets from the day they were born until the day they died, who met Jesus in the flesh, but who rejected him as their Messiah. They will include popes and kings, famous preachers who believe entertaining a congregation is more important than giving them the Means of Grace.

“Strive to enter through the narrow door.” It is open. Christ was opening it from the manger when He was incarnated. Christ was opening it from the road as He set His face to go to Jerusalem and

taught about the kingdom of God. Christ was opening it from the cross as he traded His perfect life for the death of our sin. Christ was opening it on that Sunday morning when He declared victory over sin, death, and the devil and rose from the dead.

“Strive to enter through the narrow door.” But you will tell me, “I cannot strive. I don’t have the strength.” Bless you! You are correct. We cannot strive by our own power, the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son works in us through God’s Word, Holy Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper to provide the strengthen and means to accomplish this goal. All through His Means of Grace.

The same Word of God that healed the sick, raised the dead and even spoke into the nothingness and brought forth all of creation can speak into your heart and say, “Strive to enter through the narrow door.” Then you too, by the power of the Holy Spirit, will strive knowing the blood of the lamb has washed your sins away.

“Strive to enter through the narrow door.” It is open now, but the day is coming when, just as Christ rose to open the door, he will rise to close it. Which side of the door will you be on? Fortunately, the answer does not depend on your own efforts. How blessed we are Jesus Christ saved humanity in all times and in all places. For as Christ’s saving work extends back in time to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets, it also extends forward to include all of you who believe and trust in Jesus. Thanks be to the Father who gives you the kingdom. Thanks be to Christ who strove for you on the cross and opened the door through which you enter the kingdom. Thanks be to the Holy Spirit who enlightens and sanctifies you so you can “Strive to enter through the narrow door.”