

August 21, 2022
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 13:22-30 (Hebrews 12:4-24)

JESUS IS THE NARROW DOOR.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Luke, the 13th chapter which you heard read earlier.

At the moment of conception, everyone begins a journey through this life until they reach their final destination. Thanks to our ancient ancestor, Adam and his disobedience in the Garden of Eden, everyone has inherited sin which means this life's journey will be difficult and burdensome until your physical death. Your journey will require patience and endurance. No one gets a free pass: no fetus, infant or aged, no rich or poor. All mankind faces an arduous pilgrimage to your destination.

In our Gospel text Jesus' destination is Jerusalem. His destination is to be stricken, smitten by God, afflicted, and put to death on a bloody cross. (cf: Isaiah 53:4-5) It is a journey that requires patience and endurance. He has been teaching the crowds about the day when everyone arrives at their final destination, either eternal death and damnation in hell – or – reclining at the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom. (cf: Revelation 19:7) As Jesus goes on His way someone from the crowd asks Him:

“Lord, will those who are saved be few?” (Luke 13:23)

Perhaps you have pondered the question. A 2010 Pew Research survey found that 54% of evangelical Protestants in America believe that that ***good people***, regardless of denomination, even if they are not Christian, can still go to heaven.

(<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2010/12/16/american-grace-how-religion-divides-and-unites-us/#6>) God's Holy Word and Jesus Himself disagrees.

In our text Jesus warns all mankind to:

“²⁴ Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” (Luke 13:24)

The door is narrow. The word ***strive*** is an imperative. In the original language it means ***“to engage in a contest... to fight and struggle.”*** (BDAG, 17) It is the word from which our English word ***agonize*** is derived. What is your destination? If you wish to enter the Kingdom of God it is imperative that you fight and struggle to enter through the narrow door. The way to destruction is easy and wide; however, entrance to the kingdom is narrow and is accomplished by striving and struggling.

Exactly how few or how many enter heaven is God's concern and does not belong to men. In our text, as He often does, Jesus corrects the question to get to the heart of the matter because it doesn't matter how many people will be saved. What matters is – is **this** person saved? Are you saved? Jesus did not come into the world to answer men's curiosities but to save their souls. So He makes the question personal... to the questioner... to those listening in... including you and me. What matters is – are you saved. Do you know the Master of the house? Does the Master know you? Jesus says:

¹²⁴ ***“Strive to enter through the narrow door.”*** (Luke 13:24)

Jesus' instruction to strive sounds like a Law statement. It sounds like works righteousness. As a discerning Lutheran, perhaps the suggestion of striving to enter the narrow door makes you suspicious because you know that Scripture teaches that you are saved by grace alone through faith alone. (cf: Ephesians 2:8-9) You know that it is for the sake of Jesus' sacrificial death on Calvary's cross on your behalf that you are forgiven of your sin and are made righteous before God. In His earthly life, Jesus kept God's Law perfectly on your behalf. In His suffering and death, He was delivered up for your trespasses and on the third day He was raised from the dead for your justification. (cf: Romans 4:25) Jesus did all the work. You merely receive. The riches of God's infinite love and mercy are given to you at Christ's expense as a free gift – given you in Baptism or when you were called to faith in the preaching of the Gospel.

Jesus' command to **strive** does not mean that it is your responsibility to work your way into the kingdom by your own piety, works, and deeds. No. The **striving** and **struggle** by which one enters God's kingdom is by repentance and faith – both which are worked in the human heart by the power of God. Jesus is talking about what happens **after** the Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel, enlightened you with His gifts, sanctified you in the true faith. (cf: SC, II, 5; cf: Titus 3:5) St Paul describes it this way:

¹¹⁷ ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Jesus is talking about – what the life of a Christian looks like **after** you have been declared not guilty of your sins and made righteous for the sake of Jesus. Yes, salvation is yours by the grace of God alone – but as a new creation, the new man in Christ Jesus repents and strives to live a holy and God pleasing life. The very first of Luther's Ninety-five Theses states:

“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” (LW 31, 83)

The Apology to the Augsburg Confession states:

“Love and good works must also follow faith.” (AC IV, 74, Tappert)

“Good works should be done because God has commanded them and in order to exercise our faith...” (AC IV, 189, Tappert)

But I don't have to quote our Lutheran reformers because they are merely confessing what Holy Scripture teaches. We hear this in our epistle text this morning. The book of Hebrews is written to Hebrew Christians who, like you, have received salvation by grace alone. But the Hebrews are struggling. They are struggling with persecution and with sin: the guilt of sins they have

committed, and with the shame of sins committed against them. So, the writer sends them this epistle... a sermon... to remind them of what it looks like to live a Christian life.

In the first verse of our epistle text is the word **struggle**. In the original language it is the same word that Jesus used in our Gospel text: **strive**. Strive, struggle and fight against sin. The Hebrew's suffering and struggle against sin was no different than Christians of all times and places... including you Baptized believer. They are the same struggles of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob... the same temptations of Peter, James, and John. It is a life of Law and Gospel. A life of repentance and faith.

Beginning in verse 14, the preacher exhorts the Hebrews... and you and me to:

"¹⁴ Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God..."
(Hebrews 12:14–15)

Do not wait for peace to come to you (cf: Matthew 5:23–24) but strive to live at peace with everyone, while at the same time, not surrendering and caving in to the accepted public and private sins and perversions of society. Strive to love your neighbor as yourself with genuine concern about their health, welfare, and salvation.

Repent of your sin and strive to live a holy life. You became a holy child of God when you came to faith. For the sake of Jesus' death and resurrection, God sees you as holy. As a holy child of God, have no part of gossip, greed, idolatry, selfishness, and any sort of depravity. The regenerated and new man in Christ does not live that way. He repents and strives by trusting in Jesus.

As you strive for peace and holiness, be prepared. Just like the Old Testament prophets, the apostles, and believers of all times, you will face persecution. You will be slandered. You will be called unloving, narrowminded, a bigot, and accused of being phobic of the devil's delusions. You will be made a social outcast because of your confession of Christ crucified for sinners. Wear the badge of suffering with honor for you are being persecuted or the sake of Christ Jesus.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, what is your destination? Using the metaphor of a feast, Jesus illustrates the Last Day when all mankind will reach their final destination. Entrance into the feast is through a narrow door which has been graciously open since the beginning of time; however, the time will come that the Master of the house will shut the door.

The time of God's grace will come to an end. On that day, many will be shocked to find themselves standing on the outside looking in. Some will pound on the door crying out:

"Lord, open to us,' then [the master] will answer..., 'I do not know where you come from.'" (Luke 13:25)

Those outside will argue, saying: [sarcasm on→] *"But Jesus, I know who you are. I heard people talk about you. Mom brought me to church every Christmas and Easter. I still have my confirmation Bible... somewhere in my house."* [← sarcasm off]

"27 But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!'" (Luke 13:27)

Notice. Jesus calls them workers of evil. Workers of unrighteousness. He knows their hearts. They have no faith in the Righteous One of God. The door had been open but they never took the time to enter in and have true communion with the Master in Word and Sacrament. They never took the time to get to know the Master and learn of His love and grace.

Dear beloved: You have Jesus' assurance that the Master of the house knows you. By faith in Jesus, your final destination is the kingdom of heaven. The Master knows you for He knit you together in your mother's womb and from that moment on, He has provided for your every need. You were born into sin and continue to daily sin much. But while you were still one of the unrighteous, the Master gave His only begotten Son into death to deliver you from your sins. You were once were among the ***last*** but Jesus' blood and righteousness has made you ***first***.

The Master knows you because Jesus has reconciled you with Him and He sees you as righteous and holy. He stands at the open door and welcomes you to His table to be fed by His Word and Sacrament, both here in time and there in eternity when you recline at the table in the kingdom of God.

Jesus' command to ***strive*** does not mean that it is your responsibility to work your way into the kingdom by your own reason or strength. No. You are saved by grace alone through faith in the One who died for you. You were regenerated and made a new creation in the waters of Holy Baptism where you were joined together into Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. As one born anew in Christ, you ***strive*** and ***struggle*** to enter God's kingdom by repentance and faith – repentance and trusting and believing the Gospel. (cf: Mark 1:15) It is a daily battle. So, strive and struggle. Daily drown that old Adam and arise a new creation, living before God in righteousness and purity, trusting solely in Christ for salvation.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.