

HEAVEN HAS A NARROW DOOR
Luke 13:22-30

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August 29, 2010

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Pentecost 14, c

²² Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. ²³ Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, ²⁴ "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵ Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' ²⁶ "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷ "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' ²⁸ "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. ²⁹ People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

Dear friends in Christ,

What is the most familiar Bible passage in the Bible? It could be the Christmas story or part of the Easter story or the Great Commission, but for most people it is John 3:16. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* I know I use that passage in our Super Saturday classes and confirmation classes. And what we usually emphasize with a passage like this is how God saved the world. Jesus didn't just come for people who go to church, but for everyone.

All of that is true. Interestingly enough, when Jesus was asked about being saved, he didn't quote John 3:16. I'm sure it was because he was speaking to people who already believed that they were saved, but Jesus talks about heaven and entrance into heaven in a very different way. He does not picture heaven as the place with wide open pearly gates and angels and St. Peter there to welcome one and all. Jesus tells us that HEAVEN HAS A NARROW DOOR. Why would he say such a thing?

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Jesus was traveling in the border area between Galilee and Samaria. The people who came to him were people who had a real interest in his message or people who considered themselves part of the family of faith. *²² Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. ²³ Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, ²⁴ "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵ Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' ²⁶ "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷ "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' ²⁸ "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. ²⁹ People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."*

Think how astonishing such a message that would have been! Even though there would have been people with some very different spiritual views – Jews, Romans, Samaritans – they lived in and among each other. So to talk about salvation in an exclusive way rather than an inclusive way must have been really shocking!

The door to heaven is narrow. By definition that means not everyone will get through this door. That message was shocking not just to the people who heard Jesus say it, but would also be shocking to the people who wanted to go to heaven but would not.

When that door is closed, the people who knew the owner of the house would not understand. They would point to the fact that they knew the owner. They would say they had listened to him. They would even point to the fact that they had eaten and drunk with him. That would be a particularly tragic statement because they did not eat and drink with people they did not like. This whole matter of eating and drinking with someone was also usually a sign of agreement, kind of, "we believe we are on the same page," type of thing. All these people who would not be let in would point to their long standing acquaintance with the owner of the house. But that association was not going to be enough to get them through the narrow door.

To make matters even worse, Jesus says that some of the people who would get into heaven would not have some of those close and intimate associations. They wouldn't be people from on your block, but people from far distances, east & west, north & south. In other words, they would be people that were foreign to those left standing outside the door. But the greatest tragedy is that the first would be last and the last would be first, almost as if there were a kind of spiritual game of Chutes and Ladders that would take place. None of those locked out were going to understand.

That door to heaven is our Lord, Jesus. Listen to some other ways he describes this same situation:

(Matthew 7:13) *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. (John 10:9) "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."* The reason this door is narrow? Jesus is the only way in. There is absolutely no other way in. With all of the different religions in the world, there is only one Jesus. With all the different sects and denominations of Christianity, there is only one Jesus. There is only one way, faith in Jesus and what Jesus has done. That is why heaven has a narrow door.

Jesus also tells us to, *Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.* We all know we cannot work our way to heaven and that none of our deeds will save us. Unfortunately, Satan has used this teaching and led people to believe that somehow once they have the imprint of church membership, or having graduated from a confirmation class, that they know Jesus. Jesus will say to such people: *'I don't know you or where you come from.'*

There are two great encouragements for us here. The first is to continue to rely on our baptisms every single day. It is important to reconsider that all of our sins were washed away through the miracle of baptism so that when we continue to see the failures of yesterday, we are empowered to repent and turn away from those sins and begin to live for Jesus. It's an encouragement to confess our sins every Sunday with a heartfelt attitude that says, "God have mercy on me, a sinner," and then rejoice and believe God's promise when the absolution is announced to each of us, so that we go and sin no more. The gate to heaven is narrow and we dare not ever take it for granted.

It is also an encouragement to feel some urgency as we speak to our neighbors who continue to believe there is some other way to heaven, or fellow Christians who continue to live the life of a pagan, that the time to know and believe the truth is now. You and I are the conduits God has chosen to clearly profess this truth to those around us. We do not want them to be left outside the door.

Heaven has one very narrow door and that door is Jesus. It's the only door and it may seem narrow, but it's the only one we need. Amen.