

Luke 13:22-30

Strive to enter through the narrow door

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

I ran across this story the other about a man who died. An important man. A good man. An accomplished man. He made good use of the time during his life on earth. Not a wasted moment. Always busy. Always willing to do more. Always willing to give good advice. Always willing to help more people. He went to bed at night wondering if he could have done more. Many admired him. Many will miss him. The world will be less without him.

When he arrived at the door of eternity and knocked, the voice on the other side asked, "who is it?" The man answered confidently, "It is I, John. Doer of good. Lover of mankind. Generous with my money and time. Served in many positions. Ask those who know me. They can vouch for what I said." And the voice came from the other side, "We do not know you."

He knocked again. The voice came from the other side, "Who is it that wants to enter?" Again, "It is I, John. A regular church attender. Married in the church. Generous giver of my time and money. Served on council and chaired many committees. Ask the pastor, He can vouch for me." Again, the voice came from the other side, "We do not know you."

A third time he knocked. Again, the voice asked, "Who wants to enter?" Again, "It is I John. Confirmed in the church. Married in the church. And buried in the church." Again, the voice, "We do not know you."

Finally, John knock a fourth time. They asked again, "Who is it?" This time John answered, "A sinful, mortal man, but a child of God. Lord have mercy on me." The door opened, "Let him enter."

This story is made up. My hunch is your entry into heaven will not be like that. In fact, the door to eternity is not in some far away heaven or somewhere into the future. It is here and now. It is here and now because Jesus is present. And whenever Jesus is present, the here and now, and eternity are joined together. Jesus is the Eternal Son of God, begotten from all eternity, who entered our time through the virgin Mary. Jesus is the Door for the sheep. And as Jesus teaches us this morning from our gospel, the door is narrow.

We have heard that you cannot take it with you. When we say that or hear that it often refers to the possessions and riches, we all accumulate. That would be right. Three weeks ago we heard the story about the Rich Fool who laid up the riches of his abundant harvests in bigger barns which he built for himself so that he could, "Relax, eat, drink, and be merry." But that night he died. And who would get all that stuff. You cannot fit through the narrow door with all your riches.

It this can also means more than possessions. What about your reputation? What your good works? What about all your accomplishments. The door is too narrow for them too.

Hold on there, preacher. Does it say in the Bible that the Christian's good deeds follow them? What about the parable of the sheep and goats? The sheep get in because of the good deeds to the least of these. Yes, it is in the Scriptures and Jesus already knows about them. For those Good Deeds come about from being a child of God. But you cannot bring them with you. They were done for the benefit of your neighbor. It is the mercy and forgiveness and the grace of Jesus that gets you through the narrow door.

We have heard in these last few weeks that the grace and mercy of Jesus is what brings the last to the front. Without the mercy and faith the first become last.

Which brings us back to the story, you cannot take it with you. You cannot even take Jesus with you because He is already there. It Jesus who takes you with Him. Our Lord takes you with Him because He won our salvation on the Holy Cross. He won our salvation by shedding His blood to wash away our sins so that we can have life in Him, a life that leads to eternal life, and He has claimed you and named you His in your baptism by His grace.

But the old sinful self continues to rear its ugly head in our lives. So, Jesus says, "strive to enter through the narrow door." This striving is a word that means 'agonize.' The old sinful self says, you got to work for it, and you have to earn your salvation through good works. By nature, we do not desire to be low, we want to be number one, to get ahead, even if you need to put another person down to do it. It is a struggle to let go of the sin that clings so closely. In this strive we repent, confess are sins daily.

One more thing about the narrow door. Narrow doors are designed for few people to pass through at a time. In this case one person at a time. Even on the day Pentecost when the Holy Spirit blew through the crowd at Peter's preaching and 3,000 were baptized. Each passed through the narrow door one at a time, one baptism at a time, one changed life at a time. In your Baptism, the Holy Spirit did for you what you could not. In your baptism you were stripped down and the sins that cling so closely were washed away. Not by your courage and power but by the agonizing blood, sweat, and tears of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on the Holy Cross.

Jesus has done it all and He continues to do it today for you, forgiving sins, strengthening faith through His Word, giving His Body and Blood for you for the forgiveness of sins. Giving you the comfort of the Holy Spirit to release you from the worry of whether you have done enough, worked hard enough for your salvation. Through the gospel you can let that go. It has been buried along with all the other false hopes and false idols. All that is left is just you. Just as you are. You and Jesus.

Over the last couple of weeks, I hope you have been lifted up to God individuals in our congregation in prayer. Continue to pray for them especially who have forgotten who they are in Christ and reach out to them ready with a word hope, a word of encouragement, a word of grace. This gospel witness is accomplished One person at a time, one life to another life that is so precious to God.

They will come from the east and the west and the north and the south to recline at the table of the Kingdom of God.

Peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.