

The Narrow Door

Luke 13:22–30

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In today's Gospel Jesus answers this question that I'm sure many of us are still asking even today, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" Or as the NIV puts it: "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"

Now, the way Jesus answers the question might not be what we want to hear. Rather Jesus says, it's not a matter of how many will be saved, but if you will be saved. And for you to be saved, Jesus says "Strive to enter through the narrow door..."

Many years ago, had a conversation with my 7th Day Adventist uncle who was a good church planter and an avid evangelist. We talked lots, trying to convert each other. I focused on Law and Gospel, he tried to say we can make our way into heaven by our actions. Finally, he said this, "you know what I have concluded," he said "that each denomination or religion, approaches God the way they see him. We each see a portion of God. You Lutherans might see his head, we Adventist might see his shoulders, and so on. But ultimately, he said all religions lead to God. All roads lead to God, sort of..."

I think, I would agree with my uncle, all roads might lead to God... but! In order to enter Heaven, you need to enter through the Door! All roads might lead to God, but there is only one Door you must use to get in.

One of us pastors want to pay you a visit. I'm sure we can find the shortest route to your place; several roads will lead there. There might be just one final stretch to your place, but regardless we can use several ways to get there. But unless we enter through the door you have designated as

the entrance way, you will get upset if we try to enter through other ways. What if I show up at our place and enter, I don't know, through a window maybe, a window in your bedroom for example. How would you react, what would you do? I will bet you will call the cops right away. And charge me with braking-in, wouldn't you? As much as you know us and perhaps have bonded in a special friendship but if I try to enter you house through a window and not the main door, and even force the door open, I'll do something you would not like, you would not be happy.

Now, if that is the case amongst us, now imagine God. No, he wouldn't like us braking in, and truth be told, there is no other way we could enter his home, but through what he decided is the right and the only way to enter in. Through the Door, and this door is Jesus Christ.

All roads might lead to God, but there is only one door. And that door is Jesus Christ his Son, who died on the cross of Calvary to become the door for us to enter his presence, even God's home, Heaven. Is that simple!

Even though simple, Jesus says in our Gospel reading for today, that that Door is "narrow." And that we are to strive to enter through it. "For many,...will seek to enter and will not be able," Jesus says.

"Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" Jesus' hearers had the same question we still have today. Who and how many are going to be saved? What's the standard for salvation? What about those who just live a good life? Will they be saved? What if someone never has a chance to hear about Jesus? Does that person get a "pass"? Will he or she be saved? So, Jesus answers the question not in the way we want it, rather he gets practical and personal, rather than focusing on others, he essentially refocuses the question: "Will the saved be you?" As you see

Jesus came to guide our consciences, not to gratify our curiosity. So he shifts from the few to you.

And that's the question we need to answer ourselves, "Will I be saved?" Sometimes we unnecessarily focus our attention, our energy on the things around us, when it comes to the question of who is going to be saved. Forgetting that salvation is personal. "Will the saved, be you?" Jesus asks. In fact, chapter 13 begins with the same idea. Repentance is personal, forgiveness is personal, salvation is personal. And the Door is narrow, Jesus says. So "Strive to enter through" it

Now if Jesus is the Door, why would he point the door as a narrow? Isn't he the expression for God's love for the world?

But, to the eyes of the world, it is narrow door indeed. It's possible that the narrow door, is a reference to a small gate next to the main city gate where latecomers could enter. However, the door is not narrow by nature, but because of how the condition and state of the one being saved. Jesus says that many will attempt to enter and will be turned away. Right there, is the answer, many will attempt to enter, that is to try to enter it by their own strength and wisdom. In other words, the roads I reference that lead to God represent the human effort to approach God and wanting to enter his presence but refusing to enter through the Door.

That is on the one hand, on the other, Jesus says that yes, it will take effort to enter the narrow door. The word for "effort" in Greek is agonizomai, where we get our word "agony." It suggests that there is a level of striving and struggle in the Christian life.

All that will be saved must enter the Gate, for that must undergo a change of the whole man, it begins with being born again through baptism, and strive in living a godly life. But there is our biggest struggle. We

struggle with temptations—the temptations to take the easy way out, to take shortcuts, to get distracted, to give up, and to despair of life. We must strive with God in prayer, wrestle as Jacob did in the Old Testament, strive against sin and Satan. Or run the risk of failing and fall short of grace and glory of God. We are encouraged to agonize against laziness and complacency, against the idea that God will save me anyways, regardless how I live my Christian life. Something the Jews leaders though back then, that because they were God’s chosen people, they had a place in the world to come, so people under that idea, lived as they wanted. The same reasoning persists today, that God will save us anyways, without repentance and forgiveness, and persisting in our faith walk led by Jesus, by the hand through his word and the ever-abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. Yes, God is merciful, loving and forgiving, and because of that we need to turn to him in repentance, in faith, seeking his kingdom always.

Jesus says that many will try to enter door but will fail. That is, some put an effort in the beginning, they attend church regularly, attend Bible studies, live a good moral life, but along the way we focus on the things of the world, our agonising over our sins and over wanting more of God, get’s fuelled by the desires of the world, now the Door to heaven seems too narrow to enter in.

And yet, Jesus invites us to persevere, to make every agonizing effort to enter the narrow door. And here’s the Gospel contained in this: Jesus is the one who has fought off the forces of evil already for us, opening the narrow door to us. In Luke 22, the word “anguish,” *agonia*, is used as Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane just hours prior to his arrest and agonizing death on the cross (v 44). That agony enables the door to be open to us.

We have learned that kingdom dwells in every one of us, and although it does, though it is closer to us than our own breath even—we remain in danger of missing it. It is no wonder that Jesus often compares the spiritual struggle to a battle to the death: “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat.” “Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” It is a terrible and heart-rending inner warfare, an agonizing warfare, that must be endured in the process of our enter the door.

And here’s the reason why effort is needed: because while the door is open, the door is closing. And if we don’t agonize, if we don’t make the effort, the door will be closed. Jesus says in verses 25–26, “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.’” The point is clear: Don’t Ignore the Open Door.

Don’t lazy around. Don’t spend your life getting distracted by the pleasures of the world. Press on. Make every effort to enter the narrow door.

The Good News is that Jesus has opened the door. The cross and open tomb mean this door is open too. But what you need to know at the same time is it’s a limited-time offer.

We look at these words of Jesus in Luke 13, and I can tell you that there are going to be some people come the end of the world who are going to be disappointed. And they will plead with Jesus, “Open the door to us.” And they’ll make excuses: “We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets” (v 26). “We sat in your pews. We attended your church events.” And yet, Jesus will say, “I don’t know you. Away from me.”

Rather than open, the door will be closed. And many will be turned away, while only a select few will be included in the feasting.

So let's circle back around to that question: "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" That's the wrong question. The more important question is, "Will you be saved?" And if so, how can you be saved? Salvation comes through knowing Jesus.

Remember the reason Jesus rejects those who knock? "I never knew you." And here, this is not just a "know of" someone, like I know the name of so-and-so. No, this is to know someone intimately, personally, to have that relationship with the person.

But that person did not consider what he or she knew and believed, and, consequently, his or her desires for God grew cold, and his or her strength of faith, fainted, in the end didn't press forward.

But Jesus has opened that door to have that relationship with you through his death on the cross. And in John 10, he's declared himself to be the door, and that "if anyone enters by [him], he will be saved" (v 9). He's laid down his life for you, to know you . . . and to be known by you.

There might be many roads that lead to God, but there is only one Door, we pray that God will pull us back to the correct way that leads us to the Only True Door, Jesus. And he is doing so, he is leading us through Word and Sacrament, in the narrow path, pointing us to the Door, the Door that stand open.

The invitation remains: "Strive to enter through the narrow door." While there's breath in your lungs, there's hope for your soul. Don't ignore the open door.

Amen.