

Pastor Chris Matthis  
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Proper 16 (Pentecost 11), Series C  
Saturday, August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
Sunday, August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019

**Sermon: The Narrow Door**

**Text: Luke 13:22-30**

Focus: Jesus is the narrow door by which we are saved.

Function: That they would trust in Christ alone and tell others about him.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him...” (SC, 3<sup>rd</sup> Article of Apostles’ Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Last week we heard Jesus’ difficult teaching that he came not to bring peace, but rather fire and family division. Today Jesus’ hard sayings continue with perhaps the most offensive of all: the exclusive claim of Christ. In response to someone’s question, “Will those who are saved be few?”, Jesus replies: “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and not be able” (Luke 13:23-24, ESV).<sup>1</sup> This statement—and Jesus’ explanation, which follows—point to the exclusive claim of Christ, or the idea that Jesus is the only way of salvation. Nothing and nobody else can save you or help you reach enlightenment: not Mary, not Buddha, not Muhammed, not Krishna, and certainly not your own efforts or good works. Jesus makes this abundantly clear when he declares, “*I am* the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father *except through me*” (John 14:6).

You may wish to argue that this arrangement is unfair, that a loving God couldn’t send anybody to hell, that he must provide more than one way to be saved. And many people have argued that, including the writer and pastor, Rob Bell, whose 2011 book *Love Wins*, stirred up

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

controversy American Christianity and renewed a debate about whether or not God really sends unbelievers to hell. Bell and others advocate for a kind of “universalism,” by which all people will be saved (or at least get a second chance after death). This position, they argue, is closer to the character and heart of a loving Lord.

But that’s not what the Bible says. Jesus doesn’t mince words when he excludes all other ways to God and heaven. He is “*the way*” (John 14:6) and “*the door*” (John 10:7, 9). “Enter by the narrow gate,” Jesus says in Matthew 7. “For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many” (Matt. 7:13).

So in answer to the question, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?”, Jesus declares unequivocally that most people will *not* be saved. Most people will reject Jesus and the Gospel and go to hell, a place Jesus describes as a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Luke 13:28), where the worm never dies and the fire burns forever (Mark 9:48).

This is not the kind of thing people talk about in polite conversation. In fact, this section of Luke 13 is so scandalous that most liberal Protestant churches don’t even include it in their lectionaries. This shouldn’t surprise us, since they tend to cut and splice the Scripture however they wish in order to avoid other inconvenient passages that people’s itching ears don’t wish to hear.

Biblical Christianity is grossly unpopular in our post-modern times, where I’m okay and you’re okay. As long as you’re a nice, sincere person who doesn’t force your beliefs upon me, you can believe whatever you wish. If you want to self-identify as a potato or a purple unicorn, go right ahead. If you believe that we’re all here because of some science experiment by an advanced race of extraterrestrials, good for you! If you think that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all basically the same religion and worship the same God, you go, girl!

You can go there, if you want, but Jesus didn't go there, and he won't. If you believe differently, then you are going up against Christ himself and putting yourself *outside* of the kingdom, shut out on the wrong side of the door. Then when Judgment Day comes, and the door to heaven is shut, it will do no good to knock and shout or cry and beg, "Lord, open to us!" For then Jesus will say, "I do not know where you come from" (Luke 13:25).

Nor will it do any good on that Day to say, "We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets" (v. 26). In other words, you cannot say, "Lord, I went to church every Sunday and listened to your Word, even though I didn't believe it." Nor can you say, "Lord, I just couldn't tolerate all that fire and brimstone or the idea of a God who holds me accountable for my sin." And you won't be able to say, "Lord, I appreciate many of the things Jesus said, but I just can't take it all, hook, line, and sinker." Not even intellectual assent to the existence of the so-called "historical Jesus" will be enough. After all, even the demons believe that God is one—and shudder! (Jas. 2:19).

If you reject Christ's Word and do not trust in him for the forgiveness of sins, you will be shut out. "I tell you," he will say, "I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!" (Luke 13:27). How few indeed will be saved!

But do not fear. The exclusive claim of Christ is always accompanied by God's universal invitation: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God desires all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-4). And he graciously provides the *way* to be saved: Jesus Christ, the narrow door. Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the whole world, including yours and mine. God raised him from the dead for our justification (Rom. 4:25), so that we could be made right with God by grace through faith. This is a gift—not our doing, so no one can boast (cf. Eph. 2:8-9). You

don't have to do anything to be saved. You need only believe the Word and receive the gift of faith in Christ. He is the only way.

On the Last Day, we will be surprised by who gets in and who is left out of the kingdom of God. The Old Testament saints will be there, of course, all those wonderful people in the "Hall of Faith" of Hebrews 11 (cf. Luke 13:28). People will come from every corner of the earth: north, south, east, and west (v. 29). They will number from every nation, tribe, language, and race (Rev. 7:9). Men, women, and children will gather to give glory to God. But we will be surprised, Jesus says. "And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last" (Luke 13:30).

Other people will be in heaven whom you would never expect: Rahab the prostitute and the thief on the cross. These poor souls were saved by the skin of their teeth, almost as if Jesus just barely snatched them out of the fire. But he *did* snatch them, and they were saved. Heaven will be full of forgiven drunks, rapists, murderers, and worse. Don't be too surprised! After all, Jesus welcomes sinners—even sinners like you and me!

"Strive to enter by the narrow door," Jesus says. "For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (Luke 13:24). Only Jesus Christ is the door to heaven and the way to the Father. By his grace, may we all enter by the narrow door. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.