

Pastor Chris Matthis  
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Proper 16, Series C  
Saturday, August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
Sunday, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022

Sermon: The Narrow Door

Texts: Luke 13:22-30

Focus: Faith in Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation.

Function: That they would enter heaven through the narrow door of faith in Christ.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: "I believe that Jesus Christ, my Lord... has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person..." (SC, 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of Apostles' Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Today Jesus confronts us with one of the most disagreeable truths of the Christian faith: that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. In response to the question, "Will few people be saved?" (Luke 13:23, paraphrase), Jesus replies, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (Luke 13:24, ESV).<sup>1</sup> Jesus is the narrow door (cp. John 10:7). He is the only gateway into heaven. God sets before us an "open door" (Rev. 3:8). It is up to us whether or not we will walk through it.

Jesus' mention of the narrow door sounds very like what he says in the Sermon on the Mount. There in Matthew's Gospel, we hear "Enter

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

by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matt. 7:13-14).

And in John 14:6, Jesus declares, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father *except through me.*” Jesus is *the* way to the Father—the *only* way—not one of many ways. There is no other way, no other path. Buddha cannot save you. Allah and the teachings of Muhammad will not save you. Nor does the Virgin Mary get you into heaven. Christ saves—and Christ alone.

In order to convey this point, Jesus tells a story about servants who get shut out of the party when the door closes.

There are no second chances after we die. “It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Once the door is shut, it’s shut. Ain’t **nobody** gonna get in after that. No amount of pleading for the Lord to reopen the door will work. The master will answer only, “I do not know where you come from” (Luke 13:25). So they cry out all the more, “We ate and drank in your presence, and you

taught in our streets” (v. 26). Did you catch that? They ate and drank in Jesus’ presence—undoubtedly a reference to the Lord’s Supper (or Eucharist). They also heard Jesus’ teaching. But just because you go to church and come to the Table doesn’t mean that you’re saved. If you don’t *believe* the Word Jesus speaks, you will be left outside. And that is why the master in Jesus’ parable says, “I tell you, I do not know where you come from. *Depart from me*, all you workers of evil!” (v. 27).

“I don’t know you.” Those have got to be the most damnable words imaginable. We usually think of damnation as separation from God—being barred from his presence. But to not even enter his mind?! That is worst of all. The Psalmist says that “the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish” (Ps. 1:6). In Jesus’ Parable of the Ten Virgins, there are five wise bridesmaids and five foolish bridesmaids. The wise bridesmaids brought extra oil for their lamps so they would be ready when the bridegroom came to retrieve the bride. But the foolish bridesmaids brought no extra oil, and their oil ran out. So when the bridegroom came, they were left out in the dark—literally. And although they begged for the door to the wedding

feast to be opened, the groom told them, “Truly, I say to you, I do not know you” (Matt. 25:12).

Whoever rejects Christ and his Word will not be saved. “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8-9). “I don’t know you, so go away” (v. 27, paraphrase). Those are Jesus’ words, not mine; and who am I to argue with my Lord? There will be nothing worse on Judgment Day than to be unknown to Jesus.

Yet this is an offensive teaching. Who can listen to it?! Our post-modern age no longer believes in absolute truths or exclusive claims like those of Jesus. We would rather say stupid things like “One mountain, many paths.” We claim that because God is love, he never, ever could possibly send anybody to hell. After all, how could a loving God subject his children to eternal torment and destruction? We argue that most people will be saved—if not everyone—as long as they have a sincere heart and try to be a good person. Oh, sure, we can see how the Hitlers and Stalins of the world might be damned, but surely God could not

condemn the nice Mormon family across the street or the Hindu boy born in India who never hears about Jesus. How is that fair? How is that right? Jesus would never insist upon that, would he?

First, doesn't it seem to you that the people who claim to know the most about what Jesus would or would not say are often precisely the people who have read the least of his Holy Word, the Bible? I find that quite interesting.

Second, let me remind you that God is not fair. He is gracious. And thank God for that—literally! If God were to give us what we deserve, then all of us would burn in hell. None of us deserves to be saved. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). If God gave us what we deserve, we'd be without a hope. That is why I am grateful that “he does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities” (Ps. 103:10). In other words, God doesn't give us what we deserve. Instead, he gives us grace and saves us. Instead of giving us what we deserve, he gave Jesus what we deserve: death on a cross and alienation from the Father. So before we

start pointing fingers at God and calling him unjust, remember that it is not God's ways that are unjust, but *our* ways (Ezek. 18:25).

Consider this: if all people will be saved, then why did God give as the first commandment that "You shall have no other gods before me"?

And if all people are going to be saved, then why did God tell the

Israelites to drive out the Canaanites because of their foreign deities?

And if all people are going to be saved, then why did the prophet Elijah

slay the 400 prophets of Baal? And if all people are going to be saved,

then why does Jesus give the Great Commission to the Church to make

disciples of all nations by baptizing them and teaching them (Matt.

28:19-20). And if, at the end of the day, it's OK to be Buddhist or

Muslim or Hindu or atheist, then why do we send missionaries to other

lands? Wouldn't God rather just let people go their own merry way?

And if all people are going to be saved, then why did the martyrs suffer

persecution and give up their lives for the Gospel? And if all people are

going to be saved, then why did Jesus have to die at all? You see now

that universalism is incompatible and inconsistent with the Christian

worldview. It's not what the Bible teaches. It's not what Jesus teaches.

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

But the Good News is that many others *will* enter by the narrow door. “People will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God” (Luke 13:29). Here Jesus foresees the Gentile mission and the conversion of the heathen to the Christian faith. Whether Jew or Gentile, all are welcome in the kingdom of God—if they enter by the narrow door. And, as I said before, the narrow door is Jesus.

Jesus asks nothing of us to be saved. Jesus does all the saving. He shed his blood to blot out our sins. He died gasping for air so that we could have eternal life. And on the third day he rolled away the stone and rose again from the grave. Nobody has ever rolled that stone back into place. By his death and resurrection, Jesus has opened the door to heaven for all believers. The door may be narrow, but the door is still open. There is still time to believe in Jesus and receive his forgiveness. “Strive to enter through the narrow door.”

Here is the reality: God wants to save everyone. He “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). “God so loved *the world* that he gave his only-begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God does not want to deal out death and damnation. He loves you and wants you to live forever. That’s why he sent his Son Jesus. Jesus is the door. Jesus is the only way to be saved.

But not everyone *wants* to be saved. Not everybody wants to believe in the one whom God has sent: Jesus Christ, our Lord. C.S. Lewis’s novel, *The Great Divorce*, is an excellent case study in why some are saved and not others. He shows that God is a gentleman, who will not force himself upon anyone. If you really would rather choose hell over heaven, then you can go there. If you really don’t want God in your life, then he will not force you to spend eternity with him. If you really crave hell, then he will let you have it.

Don’t choose hell. Don’t choose death. Don’t choose damnation. Instead, strive to enter through the narrow door. You may not know everything about what is on the other side of that door, but I promise

you, it is wonderful. Because Jesus will be there. And so will all the saints who have gone before us: “Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets” (Luke 13:28), all those “Hall of Faith” Old Testament believers listed in Hebrews 11, all the apostles and martyrs of the Church, all our forebears in the faith who kept the faith.

The only way into heaven is through the narrow door, but Jesus stands there even now, beckoning for you to come. I hope you will enter. For a grand reunion awaits us on the other side. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.