

✠ Luke 13:22-30 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

What on earth is our Lord doing? Search yourself and see if you are comfortable with our Lord's words. "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."

Even as you hear these words your mind races to try and soften them and make them less condemnatory. You instinctively through up a wall between you and them, a wall that must defend you against our Lord's words. You don't know how to align them with grace alone and faith alone, and you're not so sure they can be so aligned, and so these words of Jesus are easily ignored or glossed over. Why bother trying to figure out what Jesus is saying if it might put a hole in your assurance, your blessed assurance that your faith is what saves you?

And, in part, such a reaction is right. You should not be comfortable with these words because they are condemnatory, Law oriented. If you're comfortable with them then you are putting your faith in yourself. But the truth is, most of us are scared by these words of Jesus, not because we think we're sinners and won't enter the narrow door, but for a much less pious reason. We're scared of these words mainly because they require action and obedience, devotion and pursuit. And in truth you are sinful and lazy and would rather be a Christian as long as you don't have to do anything.

And if you're listening, you'll say, "How dare you call me lazy! I do a lot around here! I'm active in all manner of ways. I serve on boards, I teach Sunday School, I clean and cook at church activities! I'm anything but lazy." Good for you. It is good that you give your services to the church. It is good that you help make decisions and carry out order in this place. But how many read their catechisms daily? How many read the Bible daily? How many teach their children daily the things of God? How many even pray before meals other than when family or the pastor is present? How many pray before bedtime or when rising in the morning? How many of you go out of your way to get to church when the Lord sets His Table for you? Laziness in the kingdom of God is not a lack of being busy, but a lack of doing the things of God.

How many strive to enter the narrow door? Oh sure, many expect that that they are entering through the narrow door. We know why Jesus compared salvation to a narrow door – the same reason St. Paul says to run the race with perseverance – it's arduous because our sin is always before us waiting to devour us. Many will come to the door and knock and be turned away as those the Lord does not know! Fear God, o man, for the way of salvation is hard and the door is narrow; many who seek to enter will not be able.

"But," you say, "I'm saved. I know that it is not by my works that I obtain salvation, but by the grace of God that I inherit eternal life. I'm baptized. I have direct access to God. I know my faith is secure and my place in heaven is bought and paid for. Frequenting church more, while good, will not make me more saved." Such thinking is also right and good, for you should have unabashed confidence in our Lord Jesus, that He has saved you from your sin.

But such thinking easily springs the trap that says you may effectively ignore Jesus' words. But here they stand in all of their glory and strength, "Strive to enter through the narrow

door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” Why should the preacher be the one who has to apologize for Jesus’ harsh words and try to make them palatable and non-offensive? Why should the one who is charged before God and man with preaching the Word of God in all its fullness and power be the one who has to find a way to take away the sting of our Lord’s words while never denying that they’re true? Preachers who try to do that must eventually do one of two things: either pander to the masses, preaching that such words of Jesus don’t apply to us, or else ignore them himself and be in danger of their coming to fruition. And for preachers who preach the words of Jesus, they often hear the plea, “Preacher, stop telling me how to live!” Okay, but I’m only telling you what Jesus said. Repent.

Jesus’ words are in response to a question: “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” What a question! What audacity to think that he has the right to know the mind of God. But we have a version of this question that we like to ask but are simultaneously afraid of the answer: “Why do some believe and not others?” Or, “what about the poor child in some village somewhere who has never heard of Jesus? Will she go to heaven? After all, it’s not her fault she’s never heard of Jesus.” It’s interesting that we’re so concerned about such persons but few if any of us make our goal in life to tell everyone about Jesus. Which reveals the problem our Lord is addressing.

The problem with this man’s question, and with our spirituality in general, is that we always think of Christianity in the third person, rarely if ever in the first and second person. We love to talk about the what-ifs. We love to discuss the situations that don’t directly affect us but may affect others. But God does not come to us and postulate theology and invent cleverly formulated arguments about salvation and the goodness of God as if they apply to someone else. No, He comes to you in your life and situation and reveals Himself to you in His Son. God is concerned about you. He wants you to know Him. He wants you to come to Him in prayer. He wants you to eat and drink the body and blood of His Son, so that He may give you His Son’s life.

And so He disciplines you and cares for you. He reproveth you and chastises you with His Word. He does this so that you are refined and purified. Thus He sanctifies you and makes you holy. He loves you and gives to only what is the best for you, whether His rod or staff, He comforts you.

Repent. Stop trying to put God in a box and listen to His Son! Stop trying to explain away the mystery of God speaking to man as a man. He is the way, the truth, and the life. His words are words of grace and truth, salvation and life. He is the Word of God incarnate. Stop trying to apologize for His harshness and His difficult sayings and accept them as the very words of God, for so they are. Yet many who eat and drink with Jesus, who hear His words and see His miracles see with blind eyes and hear with deaf ears. Many reject Him by not believing His words but rather they shape His words to fit their preconceived theological assumptions. Such are those who see and hear a Jesus they want to see and hear rather than as He gives Himself.

In that place, where there are those who reject the Lord and knock on His door with their own ideas and beliefs, no matter how pious they may sound, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Do you want me to lighten the load and ease the burden? Do you want me to tell you that it’s going to be all right, that Jesus didn’t really mean this or that He didn’t have you in mind when He said it? Repent. Strive to enter through the narrow way.

Then you who are last shall be first. You who are last because you are sinners, shall be

first to dine with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the Table of the Lord, for His Table was set with you in mind. You who are last because you are mocked and ridiculed for Jesus' name shall be first in the kingdom of God, for He has given to you His name in Baptism. You who lose your life shall find it and you who sell everything and give to the poor shall gain the wealth of heaven.

But you who are first because you are righteous shall be last, for there are none who are righteous, no not one. You who glory in your own words and works shall not find a place at the Lord's Table, for He has not invited the righteous but the unrighteous. You who take pleasure in your life shall lose it, for God glories in the life of His Son not the life of His enemies. You who would be first in the kingdom because of your faith and your independence shall be last, left knocking on a closed door. Repent. Strive to enter through the narrow way.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠