

**The 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Good Shepherd LC, Charleston, SC**

**August 22, 2010**  
**Luke 13:22-30**

*The Narrow Door Is Wide Enough for You*

The way that some people think is beyond my understanding sometimes. When we read a text like our Gospel reading that explicitly says that some will be on the outside of the banquet door when it is closed and they will suffer weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now, when I read that, hear Jesus say that some will be in heaven and some will not. Those in heaven will recline at the table there in the kingdom of God. Those not in heaven will be in anguish. Reading this, how can anyone think that there is no hell or that God won't exclude anybody from heaven? Certainly, combined with other things that Jesus has said, there is a hell and some will suffer there for eternity.

Here in our text, Jesus is teaching the people, which includes that category that Luke labels the Jews; that is what we can consider the ecclesiastical leaders – the Pharisees and so on. One from the crowd wants to know if there will only be a small number of people that are saved. Presumably, he wants to know if he has a chance at being saved himself. Jesus doesn't give him a very promising answer does he? The door to heaven, it is narrow, but strive – struggle to get in through that door because there are many that won't be able to get through. Still it seems that the hope for this man asking the question is dim. If there are so many that will try to get through, what gives him any kind of advantage.

If the door is so narrow, what struggle is there that one must undertake in order to get through into heaven? I guess that depends on who you ask. The universalist which I referred to initially, would have to say that it doesn't matter, because everybody will get through. The Calvinist, I suppose would have to say also that it doesn't matter since God predetermined who would pass through, not just who may – but actually everyone that would pass through and in so doing would predetermine everyone who would not pass through. Neither of these require much faith.

Last Thursday evening I heard another option also that requires no faith. A man that I met while timing a swim meet explained why he didn't return to a particular mega-church in our area after visiting a couple of years ago. It seems that preacher understood that the door gets wider when you give a little more in the offering plate. I tend to think it just bought the pastor a nicer front door to his million-dollar home.

It is this last option that most closely speaks to what Jesus was referring. The door is narrow and hard to pass through because we as sinful human beings are always trying to devise ways to get through on our own. It's not that the door isn't big enough.

**The Narrow Door Is Wide Enough for You**

In fact the narrow door is wide enough for all people. It just isn't wide enough for us and all the baggage we would like to carry through with us. I guess I could say that the narrow door is plenty wide enough for me to pass through, it just isn't wide enough for me to pass through with the wall that I want to carry through with me.

You see, the career naval officer accumulates a number of plaques and accolades from different ships and commands through the years. So much in fact that most end up with a "me wall." It is a wall that is decorated with all their accomplishments through the years. It is something to admire and to show off. Something of a history, but certainly a catalog of all the things for which the sailor might be proud.

We all have such things. Our first grade report card that had all those outstandings and just one satisfactory; or the letters of appreciation that we receive for the different civic groups or volunteer organizations that we have helped over the years.

But there is such a wall we might say, even here, inside (point to chest). Here we collect as badges of honor those things that we think God should be proud of us for; such as perhaps the time that we did stretch and empty our wallet into the offering plate, or the times that we have overcome a temptation and were able to walk the way of righteousness. It could be any kind of thing that we think should put us in a good light or a favorable standing before God. Such things that we hold up as our own righteousness make passing through the narrow

door much more difficult, because there isn't room for our wishful thoughts of grandeur or our inflated religious self-esteem. Such

Jesus is saying there is only room for the humble to pass through trusting in His righteousness. There is room enough for everybody that lets go of their badges of honor and clings only to the cross of Christ.

Jesus dashes any hopes that one might have in their affiliation with the church. Membership in the most exclusive of congregations doesn't matter. Participation in circle groups, or men's breakfasts, or even one's perfect attendance on Sunday mornings doesn't guarantee easy entrance or even entrance at all. Jesus tells these Pharisees that they will be on the outside despite the fact that He is mingling with them now. Even if they were to entertain Jesus and have him over for dinner, doesn't mean that they will get to heaven. Neither does your contributions to the foodbank or your service at Tricounty Family Ministries. Even a life in service to the Church and the Gospel such as the Shaneyfelt's plan to share or such as the greatest of pastors that you may know; these do not make entrance easier.

It is only belief in that Gospel that is preached from pulpits or translated into new languages or expressed in love and service to a hunger neighbor that matters. It is faith that Christ has done all that is necessary for you to pass through the narrow door.

There is always the one that would argue, but Jesus says "strive to enter through the narrow door." That must mean I have to do something. And so comes the word struggle again as I have mentioned the last two weeks. That great struggle is one of faith. We must struggle and strive to put away our works and trust in Jesus alone. That is the struggle of faith. Christ has already done everything. We must simply repent of our futile efforts and trust in what He provides free of charge to those who believe. This striving is to continuously set our selves aside that we might trust in Jesus.

Jesus tells those that look to their works and their efforts, "I tell you, I do not know where you come from." That is a harsh statement. You know the saying of these Jews, "we have never been a slave to anyone, we are descendants of Abraham." That is their boast, being descended from Abraham. They trusted in their lineage to save them. They rested their salvation in the fact that they were Israelites, members of the right people that could trace their line all the way back to Abraham. Jesus is telling them that that is not the lineage to which they must cling. Such a lineage is not known in heaven, nor does it get one through the narrow door.

But you have the right lineage. Each of you here has a lineage that if you trust in it, it will give you passage through the narrow door. No, it's not your Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod lineage, but I would say that it upholds and points to the lineage that does save because that lineage that tells Jesus where you are from is found in your baptism.

It is there, in your baptism that you are grafted into the vine of Christ. There in those heavenly waters where faith was granted to you, that declares that you are born from above, you have put away yourself and cling to all that Christ has done for you. In that flood, your badges of honor are washed away and the shame of the cross is laid upon you. It is to that cross that you cling and it is that cross that bears you up above those waters as one shipwrecked clings to the plank of his ship now destroyed.

The narrow door stands open and it is open for you as part of

The multitude that comes from the east and the west  
To sit at the feast of salvation  
With Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the blest,  
Obeying the Lord's invitation.  
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

O God, let us hear when our shepherd shall call  
In accents persuasive and tender,  
That while there is time, we make haste, one and all,  
And find Him our mighty defender.  
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

All trials shall be like a dream that is past,  
Forgotten all trouble and mourning.  
All questions and doubts have been answered at last,  
When rises the light of that morning.  
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

The heavens shall ring with an anthem more grand  
Than ever on earth was recorded.  
The blest of the Lord shall receive at His hand  
The crown to the victors awarded.  
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

*A Multitude Comes from the East and the West (Lutheran Service Book 510)*

