



14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
September 15, 2019  
Luke 13:22-30

**“Enter through the  
Narrow Door!”**

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his own blood and made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father, to him be glory forever and ever Amen. In the name of Jesus, dear fellow redeemed by Jesus' blood, it takes determination, doesn't it? In order to be drafted in the NFL as a football player, what does it take? Sure, it takes some natural skills, but that's not just it, is it? If someone wants to compete at the professional sports level it takes determination, it takes practice, it takes discipline, it takes grueling work outs, it takes disciplined diets, it takes sweat, right? Well, what about to become a doctor? If you want to become a good doctor, what does it take? It takes an intense determination, years of focused study, a residency, practice, discipline. What does it take to be part of our military? It takes determination, it takes focus, it takes a certain physical discipline, it takes commitment to live according to certain rules, it takes submitting to chain of command. So, what do these three things, being in the NFL, becoming a doctor, or becoming part of the military all have in common? They're all a narrow door, right? Along with all kinds of other things in life: if you want to be a renowned musician, it takes years of dedicated practice, if you want to get good grades, it takes effort and discipline. You see, really, to be successful in anything in life, it's a narrow door. It's something that's been built into the very fabric of our lives.

One thing that no one really wants to be called is, “narrow-minded.” Right? “You're narrow minded.” However, the way everything in this world is set up, the way life is set up, you can't be successful or achieve, without being narrow-minded. We understand that you have to be narrow for success in just about every aspect of life, but then, when it comes to spiritual things, we don't want to be narrow. Our world doesn't want to be narrow. You've heard it, I've heard it, we know people who say it: “There are many paths to God, there are many ways to God, there are many different paths to heaven, it doesn't really matter what you believe as long as you are sincere, except for the really, really, really bad people, everyone will end up in heaven, don't be so narrow-minded, don't be so judgmental, who do you think you are to say that there's only one way to God?” But, that's not how the universe was set up and that's not what Jesus tells us.

Jesus has words of warning for us today. And they are words of warning not just for people who think the door to heaven isn't narrow, but also for us, how have I bought into this lie? Am I living like the door isn't narrow? Is the worldly influence affecting the way that I live my life?

What Jesus makes very clear to us here is that there are only two places to be: either you're going through the narrow door or you're not. There's no gray area, there's no being on the fence, there's no neutrality, either you're entering through the narrow door or you're not. And the outcomes are just as staggering. What's the outcome of entering through the narrow door? What's the outcome of not entering through the narrow door? Jesus tells us here.

Someone came up to Jesus with a question. **“Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”** That's a good question, right? Perhaps that question has arisen in your mind too as you look at the world around us, as you observe godlessness and evil and blatant immorality and wickedness in the world. But, let's take a step back, as Jesus does, and ask what's behind this person's question. This is his assumption: “Of course, I'M part of the group, I'M part of the in-group that's going to be in this heavenly feast, but...what about these other people?” And what's interesting is that Jesus doesn't just respond to “him” he responds to “them.” This arrogant curiosity, this pride assumption wasn't just in this person's heart, it was in other hearts there too.

So, Jesus' words are just as searching for you and me as if we're in the crowd there too. What does Jesus tell us? **“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and not be able to.”** You see, the door is narrow, there's only one way to eternal life. It's through repentant trust in Jesus as your Savior. There are no

other doors, no other ways, no other paths to life. There's a heart-check here for all of us. Am I going to be one of those, who like the Israelites of Jesus' day, were first but found themselves last? Am I one who could say, "But I ate and drank with you – I even was nourished by the Lord's Supper" only to hear, "I don't know you...away from me you evildoers!" Am I going to finally meet with closed door and be weeping and gnashing my teeth?

What might be the signs of me going down the wrong path, of not going through the narrow door? Well, first the door is narrow, it's personal. It deals with each one of us individually. I can't slip in with the crowd or get in because my family is, it's not like a family pass where you purchase one ticket and the whole family gets in, it's personal, it's individual. What else? It's narrow. There isn't room through this door for anything but you. There's no room through this door for anything that displeases the Lord. My selfishness doesn't fit, my greed doesn't fit, my lust, my pride, grudges won't fit through that narrow door. I recently heard a story about a pastor who was working with this man and he was ready to come to church when he suddenly said, "Wait. Does this mean I'm going to have to forgive my sister-in-law and have to begin speaking to her?" To which the pastor responded, "Well, not as an absolute requirement to be a Christian, but eventually Jesus will ask that of you." To which the man responded forget it. He understood, the door was too narrow for his grudge to go with him.

Jesus says, "**Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.**" The word "make every effort" actually comes from the athletic field, it's striving with every muscle, it's training, it's diligence, it involves discipline, it's striving against sin, it's striving to grow in my faith in every opportunity because if I'm not growing in my faith, I'm losing my faith. And the warnings are stark and sobering. "**Standing outside knocking and pleading**" only to hear "**I don't know you or where you come from.**" "**Away from me, all you evil doers.**" "**Weeping and gnashing of teeth.**" "**You yourselves thrown out.**" Are you making every effort to enter through the narrow door? That's the question Jesus wants us each to consider.

But that same Jesus who warns us about being the ones on the outside looking in, was at this very moment heading to Jerusalem to put the final touches on that narrow door and open it wide open. You see, Jesus went through a narrow door himself. He's in heaven, he's looking down and sees that if he came to earth he's going to have to give up all his glory and be born in poverty, a dirty manger, a little baby. In the garden of Gethsemane he knew that the soldiers were coming to torture him, nails in his hands and feet, thorns in his scalp, spear in his side, slow death of suffocation, but that was just a mosquito bite compared to God's wrath for the sins of all people. And what did he choose? He went through that narrow way that led to a narrow tomb. But the back of the tomb became the way of life, life eternal for you and for me.

You see, Jesus warns us because he loves us too much to let us go on a careless way away from him and be lost always on the outside looking in. No, he loves us too much, he longs for you and me to be among the countless believing host who will stream from the east and west, from the north and south, to take our places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets. This narrow door has always been more than sufficiently wide for every humble, repentant heart. To every heart that's been taught by God's Spirit to confess the reality that though we deserve to be last, to be the ones shut out, Jesus graciously smiles at us and doesn't say, "Away from me..." but rather, "Of course, I know you, I wrote my name on you in your baptism, I fed you with my Word, I nourished you time and again with my own body and blood in the Supper, you're mine! Come! Enjoy the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world!"

So, every day we sing as we did earlier, "I walk in danger all the way" – there's so much that could pull me away and direct me away from that narrow door. But all the while Jesus whispers to our repentant hearts, something else to repeat again and again, "My walk is heav'nward all the way." Make every effort to enter through the narrow door! Amen.