

**Luke 13:22-30**

Pentecost 11 + Proper 16C + August 25, 2019  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho  
Pastor Tim Pauls  
The Narrow Door

The Word of the Lord from Luke 13:29: “And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.” This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Once upon a time, there was a remote village in a northern latitude. It was a rather normal village, with houses and driveways, roads and sidewalks, parks and grocery stores. The people were generally friendly, and they especially enjoyed the summer months with warm temperatures and pleasant days. When winter arrived, however, they saw very little of each other: you see, the village received heavy snowfalls several times a week throughout the cold months, and no one had ever devised a method for clearing snow from their driveways and sidewalks. When the first storms hit, the residents retreated into their homes. They lived on canned goods that they had stored for this very purpose, working their way through the supply and waiting for spring to come. They were quite weak, pale and irritable by the time spring arrived, but only when the sun returned and the snow melted would the villagers even think of going outside and trying to make their way even to the mailbox.

I said they were generally friendly. I didn't say they were smart.

One day, a new instrument arrived at the village hardware store, a newfangled device called the “snow shovel.” The villagers were skeptical at first; but after staring and talking about the awkward implement for a long time, they began to buy. Soon, everyone had a snow shovel. Many bought two or three – some even half a dozen. They did so just in time, for a cold north wind was starting to blow, and iron gray clouds were on the horizon.

The snows came, and the villagers had their shovels. Some of them mounted their shovels above the fireplace to note that it was winter. Others cut the handles into three pieces, attached them to the blade and made short stools ... or very tall pet dishes. Still others took advantage of the blade's shape to carry their canned good up from the basement in greater quantity. In all, the vast majority of villagers made various uses of their snow shovels for various purposes throughout the cold winter months while they stayed inside. Still, they grew pale and weak and irritable. When they finally ventured outside, they were in for a surprise: a few of their fellow villagers were strong and vigorous and ... happy! When they inquired, it came to light that these villagers had spent many winter days outdoors with various activities like snowshoeing and skiing, and going to the grocery store for fresh food. They'd even celebrated the inaugural winter celebration with festivities.

How could this be? It turned out that these vigorous villagers had used their snow shovels to – get this – shovel snow. With clear driveways and sidewalks, they'd been free to move about, to enjoy daylight ... and fresh food!

This discovery transformed the village! The majority of villagers called for a council meeting, for there was clearly only one thing to do: they passed a resolution that, because they were only good for one thing, snow shovels should be outlawed. Thus they sought to restore peace to their village, proving once again that they were not very smart – and now, they were not particularly friendly.

Once upon a time, the only-begotten Son of God became flesh, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. The Word became flesh – the Light came into the darkness: the Christ came to save the world from the curse of sin. When He healed the sick and raised the dead, He did so to show

that He had power over the effects of sin on the body. When He calmed storms, He did so to show that He had power over the effects of sin on nature. *Everything* that Jesus did and taught, on the way to the cross, was to demonstrate that He was in fact the Messiah who had come to save the world from the curse of sin, most of all eternal death. That is no little thing.

We might put it another way: Jesus came to do one thing, and that was to redeem the world from sin. He did it because nobody else could, and He did it well. Without Him, there was no hope of salvation; but with Him, anyone and everyone could be saved.

Jesus received various reactions from those who lived in the world. The Pharisees were quite happy that the Christ had come, as long as He was there to give more laws and help them enforce the rules. I would think that the Sadducees were with Jesus, as long as He was willing to reconcile some of His stranger teachings with the marvelous philosophies put out by the Greeks. I imagine that the Romans were quite happy that the Christ was there, as long as He helped keep His fellow Jewish citizens at peace and submissive to authorities. The tax collectors and prostitutes were astonished and delighted that Jesus would share meals with them and teach them; but as I'm quite sure that not every tax collector and prostitute repented, I imagine there were plenty of sinners who got it wrong and were happy that the Christ was there because they figured they could just go on sinning and still get to heaven.

In other words, many people welcomed Jesus because they assumed that He was there for many different things. But Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees, because their rules and reasoning said that salvation wasn't found in the forgiveness of sins. While He taught that people should honor authorities, He was not above criticizing rulers for their transgressions – He hadn't come to assist tyranny. And where sinners refused to repent, He didn't assure them that He was the free meal ticket to the wedding feast of the Lamb anyway. Instead, He warned them of everlasting condemnation.

In response, the world decided that, if Jesus was sort of this “niche-Messiah” who was only good for the forgiveness of sins, then it was best to get rid of Him.

So it is today. There are plenty of people who are happy to claim Jesus their own, just not for the forgiveness of sins. You can find people who see Jesus as a great teacher who has lots of advice on how to live – in other words, they see Him as a life coach, not a Savior. You can find folks who see Jesus as a form of crowd control, to influence elections or even prevent revolution – and others who believe that Jesus came to defend democracy and freedom from government interference. You can certainly find people today who see Jesus as the champion of tolerance, who redefine Christian love to mean saying that God approves of whatever sins people want to commit. All sorts of people claim Jesus as their own, as approving their plans, sins and personal agendas. Some of these, if you ask, will admit that Jesus has something to do with forgiveness. Many won't care or will outright deny it. After all, a savior who comes to forgive sins is a narrow-minded individual with an exclusive agenda: and that's not attractive in a world that's all about tolerance and inclusivity.

Jesus' warning in our gospel lesson is most appropriate for our present time. On the Last Day, many will stand before Him, many who expect to hear His welcome into heaven. They will say, “Lord, open to us,” and He will answer, “I do not know you.” They will say, “We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets!” But He will say, “I tell you, I do not know you. Depart from Me, all you workers of evil.”

Many will consider Jesus unfair for this, but remember: Jesus came for the forgiveness of sins. When people arrive on the Last Day and say, “O Lord, we neither repented nor wanted forgiveness, but we used Your name to justify all sorts of things that we wanted instead,” is that any wiser than, say, converting your snow shovel into a three-legged stool while a blizzard howls outside?

For speaking this truth, that Jesus came for that narrow door of the forgiveness of sins, you will be called narrow-minded. I don't think I have to spend time pointing out how much pressure the Church faces for saying that sin is still sin and in need of forgiveness. Instead, I will encourage you to consider the joy of that narrow door.

I've said it before: imagine you're in a burning building, where it seems that all exits are blocked and you have no hope. All of a sudden, a firefighter bursts through a door that nobody has noticed, and declares that he's come through an exit unobstructed by fire. He even volunteers to carry you to safety. Are you going to complain that there is only one door? Will you refuse the rescue because you don't like the shape of the door handle? Will you stay where you are because you like the furniture, and you'd rather perish with it than be delivered? I think not. I think you'd be delighted that there is a door, that there is a way of escape.

Apart from Christ, there is no salvation. Apart from the undeserved mercy of God, there is only death – eternal death. While we were sinners, Christ died for us. By His death and resurrection, He is the door. He is the rescue from sin, death and hell. He is the only Savior because no one else can do it. It is a tragic testimony to the curse of sin that God sends His Son into the world to save sinners (at His cost – His blood!); and rather than rejoice in salvation, sinners get upset that there is only one Savior!

I would also ask you this: is the door really that narrow? Jesus calls it narrow, but yet it's wide enough to receive people – many people – from the east and the west, from the north and the south. He gathers His people from all nations, Jews and Gentiles alike – even people from Boise, Idaho. It is not narrow because only a few can be saved. It is only narrow in the sense that there is only one door – through whom *all* who believe will be saved! Heaven will not run out of room.

My friends, it is easy to miss the joy of this text: much of it is spent on warning about getting Jesus wrong and facing judgment, enough that it is easy to miss Jesus' joyful proclamation that He has died for all – for every people, language, tribe and nation – so that all who believe in Him will be saved. When the world finds fault with the narrow door, rejoice that there *is* a door that welcomes sinners. So the Lord has welcomed you, washing you clean and forgiving your sins. Heaven is yours, and what awaits in heaven? Not just a rescue, but His people recline at His table in His kingdom forever. That's good news indeed.

The feast awaits!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen