

22AUG10 Text: Luke 13:24 ***“Strive to enter through the narrow door”***

No one likes to be excluded. Young children become upset and start crying when they are left out of a game or an activity that everyone else is playing. Adults don't feel good about themselves when they are not invited to a party or if they've been overlooked when promotion time comes around. At one time or another in our lives we have all been excluded from things which we would have liked to have attended or which we would have liked to have been invited. It is painful to be on the outside looking in.

God doesn't want to exclude people from heaven. He doesn't throw a party and then only invite a few, "select" people who measure up. God invites all people to share His heaven, to feast at His eternal wedding banquet, to live forever joyfully in His presence. The one stipulation that God gives to people is that they must enter through the door. Not an unreasonable demand...we don't have a dinner party and allow our guests to climb in through the windows. They walk in through the door. In a similar way, the invitation of the Gospel goes out to all and is open to all...ETERNAL LIFE AND SALVATION...but again, people must enter heaven through the door. In our Gospel lesson today we learn that

JESUS IS THE NARROW DOOR

1. that opens to eternal life. We also learn that JESUS IS THE NARROW DOOR
2. that will indeed be closed on Judgment Day. The good news is that JESUS IS THE NARROW DOOR
3. that remains open now for all who will enter through Him.

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus was teaching and preaching in various villages when He was approached with a question: *“Lord, will those who will be saved be few?”* The question was not about **how** to gain salvation but rather about **how many** will gain salvation. Jesus did not respond to the question about **how many** will be saved but instead He directed His listeners to the much more important question that was not asked: *“How is a person saved?”* Jesus gives the answer to that question and states that He is the way to heaven, He is the way to eternal life. In the words of our text: *“Strive to enter through the narrow door.”* JESUS IS THE NARROW DOOR. The apostle records Jesus' words: *“I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved.”* (John 10:9) How

does one gain salvation? Jesus could not have made it any clearer than He did. He **extends** the invitation. He **offers** salvation. He speaks of the **one stipulation**: Enter through the door that leads to eternal life. Jesus says, *“Enter through **Me**, I am the narrow Door.”*

On this occasion long ago, Jesus did not only point His listeners to Himself as the Way to eternal life, but the words of our Gospel lesson this morning also contain a warning to all those who sit around and idly speculate about eternal matters. Jesus did not merely say, *“Enter through the narrow door,”* but **“Strive to enter through the narrow door.”** The From this word in the original Greek text translated both as *“make every effort”* in the NIV and *“strive,”* here in the ESV, we derive our English word **“agonize.”** It’s the same word used later on in the Gospel to describe our Lord’s suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, as He agonized in prayer. So while the invitation is clearly extended and the way to eternal life clearly shown through Jesus, the narrow Door, we also learn that **such entrance is often an agonizing process as we live our life of faith in this fallen world.** Matthew records Jesus’ words from His Sermon on the Mount, words which convey this same sense of **urgency** and **seriousness** about one’s eternal salvation: *“Enter 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) **Make every effort, strive, yes, agonize** to enter through Him! Ignore the many distractions of the world with its broad, easy way that only leads you farther and farther away from your Savior.

Jesus gives another warning to those who idly speculate and delay with regards to those very important matters pertaining to their eternal salvation. There is a time limit placed on the invitation Jesus extends for He is the Door that will be shut on Judgment Day. Jesus said: **“Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.** *When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ Then you will begin to 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 where you come from.’* (Luke 13:24-27)

No one likes being excluded. It is painful to be overlooked and passed by. **Can you imagine the agony of being excluded from heaven for all eternity and not being recognized by the One who died and rose to save you?** Can you imagine the eternal regret of knowing that you **once had an opportunity to believe** but rejected Jesus and His offer of eternal life and salvation? **JESUS DOES NOT RECOGNIZE UNBELIEF!** Jesus is not swayed by excuses. **He so wants to impress upon us that our eternal salvation is not a matter of idle speculation, a matter of carefree ease for which we have all the time in the world to consider.** He died to gain a place in heaven for each of us and for all people. If we ignore that and treat that as if it means nothing, then we are left to face that awful question posed by the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews: *“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”* (Heb. 2:3)

The Word of God tells us, *“It is appointed for man to die once, and after this the judgment.”* (Heb. 9:27) At death, one either enters through the narrow Door of Jesus to the joys of eternal life in the God’s presence forever or one is left outside, forever excluded from the heavenly wedding banquet of the Lamb. There is no second chance! What takes place on Judgment Day at the final resurrection for those who died years earlier will only confirm the faith or the lack of faith a person had in Christ at death. Is it any wonder Jesus so strongly encourages us, *“Strive to enter through the narrow door.”* Yes, endure any agony of living in this fallen world. Strive against the deceitfulness of sin. Do whatever it takes to put down anything and everything that hinders your relationship with Christ. He is calling out to us again today to **prioritize our faith life** and remove all hindrances and stumbling blocks to it. Some, having neglected this salvation and spurned the invitation will try to argue their way out of their sad fate: *“We ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets.”* We could apply the words very concretely and say: *“We were confirmed, we even went to church now and then.”* It doesn’t count merely being close to the Word whenever we feel like it. It doesn’t mean we do an occasional good deed and then look heavenward and say, *“God, did you take note of that one?”* **No, what counts is faith in Jesus, trusting Him alone for our salvation.** Some of our Savior’s harshest words in the Gospel are leveled at those who had the truth but ignored it or rejected it. *Do we recognize that we too can lose our faith through neglect of the Word, by spurning the Sacrament?* When we repeatedly choose sin over our Savior, we are in danger of losing our faith and falling away from Christ. Make no mistake about it, it is a striving, it is an agonizing effort to enter through Jesus, the narrow Door to eternal life,

because **Satan**, the **world** and our **own weak, sinful flesh** combine their forces each and every day of each and every week of each and every year to do everything in their power to finally keep us on the outside looking in, to lead us to other doors which open down passageways and **mazes of sin** and vice from which we may not find our way back out again. **Strive to enter through the narrow Door of Jesus.** That door will one day close to all unbelief.

God comes to us in His Word this morning to **remind us** about such important things and to **shake us up a bit** so that we clearly see once again that our eternal salvation is not a matter of idle speculation or carefree ease. Once God has gotten our attention, He **invites us to believe the good news that through His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, all of our sins have been washed away and that this same Jesus is the narrow Door that opens to eternal life.** While we have been warned that the door will be closed at the hour of judgment, it now remains open for us and for all who will enter through Him. Whatever pathways we have wandered down this past week, whatever forbidden doors we have dared to open and look behind, God calls us back to Himself again today. He invites us to return to Him in **heartfelt repentance** and to once again wash away all of our sins in the blood of His Son so that we are made clean. In the words of the familiar hymn:

*Today Your gate is open And all who enter in
Shall find a Father's welcome And pardon for their sin.
The past shall be forgotten A present joy be given
A future grace be promised A glorious crown in heaven.*

Nobody likes being excluded. God doesn't want to exclude **anyone** from heaven and the joys of eternal life in His presence. God invites **all people** to share His heaven. There is only one stipulation: **enter through the door.** JESUS IS THE NARROW DOOR that opens to eternal life. Strive to enter through Him. Amen.

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