

## Proper 16C – Luke 13:22-30, The Narrow Door

1. Narrow doors, what images come to mind when you think of narrow doors? – Difficult entry...don't put narrow doors for handicapped access...limited... we can think of some life examples
  - a. College Entrance is a limited process or narrow door
    - i. Not everyone gets to go to Harvard, Yale, etc
    - ii. Get good grades, good SATs, etc if you want to qualify
    - iii. Not surprisingly we're OK with that – we understand that not everyone is Ivy League ready or worthy
  - b. Same with something as different as professional sports
    - i. Again not everyone's a Tom Brady, Wayne Gretsky, etc
    - ii. They have to train long and hard to get where they are and some just don't have it no matter how hard they train or how much they desire it.
    - iii. Again, we're OK with that we understand it
  - c. But when it comes to heaven, we have a difficult time with limited access
    - i. We want to believe that hell and eternal damnation are reserved only for really bad people and that most people who are just going along to get along deserve heaven.
    - ii. It seems to the sinful human mind that God, being so great and loving, would just overlook our foibles, peccadilloes, faults – OUR SINS
    - iii. But God says, "**You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.**" (Lev 19:2)
    - iv. And our Lord Himself says just the opposite of what most people think about heaven and hell, "**For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.**" (Mat 7:13)
  - d. So how does an unrighteous sinner enter into the gates of heaven if the standard is perfection?
    - i. That gate is narrow, in fact it's only one person wide, and that person is Jesus – if you want to enter the gates of heaven the only way in is through Christ
    - ii. This is one of, if not the greatest "turn-offs" to Christianity in the eyes of the world, it's scandalous.
    - iii. How can we Christians claim that we have the only way to get to heaven and that everyone else in the world – sincere believers of all types and of course people who don't believe will be left out?
2. That's at the heart of the conversation that Jesus has in our Gospel lesson today
  - a. In our text Jesus continues His journey towards Jerusalem and crucifixion
    - i. While He's teaching and preaching along the way an unknown man asks a question, "**Lord, will those who are saved be few?**" (Lk 13:23)
    - ii. Seems a reasonable question; inquiring minds want to know Jesus what's your answer?

- iii. Society at that time was cosmopolitan with many gods from the great pagan societies of Greece and Rome – was question of some import
    - iv. It's also the question of the day today in our multicultural, sophisticated, sensitive society. Who will be saved? Don't want to offend. There are lots of different faiths, lots of sincere people...
  - b. But the question belies a problem
    - i. It's stated in the third person, "will **those** who are saved?"
    - ii. This was a common debate at that time amongst the rabbis. Who and how many are going to be saved? More of an academic exercise than a true question.
    - iii. How often do we encounter that in our own society in our own lives?
    - iv. Has anyone ever come up to you to ask you a question not to learn the answer but to start a dispute or play an intellectual game?
  - c. Salvation is an all or nothing prospect that pertains to EVERYONE
    - i. It's not an abstract, academic point to be debated at arm's length as the Rabbis of Jesus' day were doing.
    - ii. Jesus cuts to the chase by redirecting the questioner
    - iii. He takes the question out of the theoretical...out of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person and makes it personal, "**(You) Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.**" (Lk 13:24)
- 3. We learn two things about salvation from Jesus' explanation of the "narrow door" – there's only one chance and merely knowing some facts about Jesus won't count
  - a. First, Jesus says, "**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.'**" (Lk 13:25)
    - i. NOW is the time of grace, there won't be a second chance
    - ii. There is an urgency to Christ's preaching that compelled Him
  - b. Secondly, those who are not saved will be aware that they are shut out, and will make excuses as we see in Verse 26, "**We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.**"
    - i. The parable was directed at the Jews around Jesus who expected to be saved because they were the children of Israel
    - ii. When they recognize that Jesus was the key they plead, "**But we were there around you...we heard you teach...**" But they didn't believe, they didn't accept that Jesus was the Messiah
    - iii. Being around Him isn't enough, knowing the story – that He died for the sins of the world isn't enough, that's still distant from you
    - iv. Luther put it this way, "**For even though you know that He is God's Son, that He died and rose again, and that He sits at the right hand of the Father, you have not yet learned to know Christ aright...[until you also] believe that He did all this for your sake, in order to help you.**"

4. That's what our Lord was trying to impress upon the Jews gathered around Him – salvation first and foremost isn't about "them" but "me"
  - a. It isn't something we can hold from a distance and look at, evaluate in an indifferent, scientific manner
    - i. Christ came into the flesh to bear your sin and be your savior – Yes He did it for the world, but that means He did it for YOU, TOO!
    - ii. Today is the day of salvation as Paul says in 2 Cor, **"In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."** (2 Cor 6:2)
  - b. Christ IS the narrow door as He says in Gospel of John, **"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."** (Jn 10:9)
    - i. Cast aside the sinful intellectual curiosity that seeks to reduce what the Lord has done to a mere theoretical proposition and by the Holy Spirit take hold of the promise of salvation secured by your Savior.
    - ii. That's the promise the Lord offers to you every week in service over and over again: "I forgive YOU all your sins...take eat this is my body...take drink this is my blood FOR YOU!"
    - iii. We receive His grace and mercy repeatedly every week when we come together to worship reminding us of His great promises.
  - c. Unlike Ivy League colleges or professional sports teams where some will be excluded because they didn't meet the requirement - Christ died for the sins of the world to open heaven for ALL people through Him
    - i. Even though the door to salvation is narrow, found only through Jesus, it is open to everyone
    - ii. The Kingdom of Heaven is the least exclusionary place to enter where the greatest reward of salvation is offered to everyone free of charge...a gift from God to you made possible by Christ
    - iii. With that knowledge we should be thrilled to make it our life's mission to tell everyone we know about this gift that will only be offered in this life...when you die it's too late, now is the time of grace
    - iv. Christ is the narrow gate to salvation open to everyone who believes in Him - enter and live!