

THE NARROW WAY!
Pentecost 13 (August 22, 2010)
Rev. Steven D. Spencer - Pastor
Luke 13:22-30

22 And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there *just* a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 "Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' 26 "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; 27 and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.' 28 "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being cast out. 29 "And they will come from east and west, and from north and south, and will recline *at the table* in the kingdom of God. 30 "And behold, *some* are last who will be first and *some* are first who will be last."

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, Amen!

As some of you know I love to hike. I don't get a chance to go hiking very much these days. But when I was younger I would hike whenever I could. One of my favorite places was the High Sierras. There is one place in particular that stands out. It was a primitive trail above Mono Pass. The trail was overgrown and hidden. Some people said that the mountain goats created it because the trail is only about a foot wide. But there was one spot on that trail which really pointed to it being a goat trail. It's portion of the trail that is only about twenty feet long and extremely treacherous. The trail narrows to about to about six inches in width. To the left is a sheer rock face that gently sweeps over head like a giant wave. To the right is a precipice that is 2 to 3 hundred feet deep. One false move and you would plummet into the rocky abyss below. The path is so narrow that you have to remove your backpack. And to make matters worse right in the middle of this section is an obstacle called the eye of the needle. The eye not even six feet tall. The opening is so small that a person can only get through it is by taking nothing with them. How do you get the gear you left behind? "By lowering a rope from above". But the reward for all this effort is the most beautiful alpine meadow you have ever seen. There at the end of the trail is soft loamy soil to pitch a tent on, a beautiful clear mountain lake, and a view of mountain vistas unequalled. You don't have to worry about trees blocking the view because you're above the timber line. At night you can see a million stars. But the only way to get there is a narrow way, a way that requires you to leave everything behind to go forward.

In our text today Jesus had been traveling from town to town and village to village. Teaching the Good News of repentance for the Kingdom of God was at hand. One of the things we don't tend to realize is that during this time of Jesus ministry much diversity existed in Israel. The Jewish people had many factions, the Sadducees who collaborated with the Romans, the Hasideans who were much like the Amish today who objected the Greek Hellenism, it was from that group came the Pharisees, a toned down version of pietism. Also existing were the Zealots who formed by the militant order of Maccabees. They wanted war with any that would put Israel in subjection. The counter part to the Zealots was the Essenes who claimed that God through spiritual force, not physical force, would restore Israel. This group embraced a monastic life, being cut off from society, trying to recreate Eden by their actions.

Each of the groups believed they had the one thing necessary thing to be saved. But they couldn't agree on what that one thing was. For centuries they disagreed and even fought among themselves. By the time Jesus spoke to them they had come to an understanding. "They agreed to disagree!" That doesn't mean they never argued again, they did. But by and by, they agreed to disagree. They changed the way they looked at things. Instead of putting emphasis on the truth they put emphasis on the emotion. As long as you're passionate enough about your convictions then you'll be alright with God. They even had a Greek phrase to describe it: ἐνόητα τῆς ποικιλίας καὶ ποικιλία

της ἐνότητα), unity in diversity and diversity in unity. It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you have conviction. Or as others say today, a burning in your bosom, your heart.

Isn't it the same today? People are constantly saying it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe something. Don't push your beliefs on anyone else; that's just not right! If you don't think people say this, let me share what was said during an OPB documentary on the settling of the North West Territory. They commented on how the white man had pushed their beliefs on the Indian. Rather than embracing the Indian beliefs they insisted on teaching Christianity. They went on to claim that this was a crime against society. And fortunately today people can choose what they want to believe, after all there a lot of ways to spiritual fulfillment (whatever that means). Let's bring it a little closer to home. Julia Roberts just got through acting in the block buster movie "Eat Pray Love". I haven't seen the movie and most likely won't. But according to an interview the filming of the movie had more than an impact on her waistline, it changed her religion. Julia was raised in a Christian family (Baptist and Catholic), but now practices Hinduism with her husband Danny Moder and three children. Hindus believe in reincarnation, and Julia already has some general plans for her next life: She says, "I've been so spoiled with my friends and family in this life. Next time I want to be just something quiet and supporting."

C. S. Lewis a renowned Christian writer said the religion of the world is Hindu. A poll in 2009 shows that conceptually, at least, we, that is the United States, is slowly becoming more like Hindus and less like traditional Christians in the ways we think about God, our selves, each other, and eternity. People think God has a whole bunch of different names. Choose one and try to live up to the standard. As long as you're passionate enough about your convictions then you'll be alright with God. Has anything changed over time? No! To people in Jesus day and to world of today the way of salvation is broad, just choose a path and makeup a god. This is one of the great lies of Satan. Where is the emphasis? Not toward God but towards self? It's looking inward rather than upward, looking to self for the answer rather than outside of self.

It's to these people and to us that Jesus speaks His words verse 23 and 24: **"And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."** Notice in our text that the person asking the question already notices great diversity between groups. Jesus message is simple, **"Repent and Believe!"** All these other groups continue to hang on to what they've been doing all these years. Does that mean all these other groups won't be saved? Jesus answers that with verse 24, **"Strive to enter by the narrow door"**.

But what is this narrow door? It's not a what, but a who. It is Jesus! He is the way and is the Narrow Door. Why are so few then saved, when He had accomplished all for their salvation, when He would have all to be saved? Why? Why are there, even among Christians, so many people are not spiritually fulfilled? Why?

I believe it's because people have not entered completely through the narrow gate. They may have stepped in part way, but not all the way. A moment ago I told you about the eye of the needle. What didn't tell you is that it was about teen feet long. You had snake through the rock door for about ten feet before you reached the other side and there are holes that drop to the abyss below. You can't get through it with a pack or any extras; you have to leave them behind. The same is true when you enter through the narrow gate named Jesus. People are trying to stand in the doorway one foot on the fleshly earth and one foot in God's Kingdom.

The People of Jesus day were trying to enter through the narrow gate with a backpack full of self righteousness and self proclaimed good works. Let me in, I've done so much good. Look at me, all my good works. I'm a wonderful person I've even helped people in need. But when the focus is inward it is always sin. I apprehensively say it, but more sin has been committed in the name of God

than any of us really know. Our works will not save us. ***“All our righteous works are like filthy rags”*** (Isaiah 64:6). Look at verses 25 through 27. ***“Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ ‘But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ ‘Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ ‘But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’”*** All those works that we deemed so valuable are nothing without faith, without Christ. To enter the narrow door one must leave behind the backpack of self righteousness and self proclaimed good works.

The second thing that the people of Jesus day filled their backpack full of was human birthright. I have the right breeding and therefore let me in. It is my right! I’m a child of Abraham, open the door. Maybe you wouldn’t say I’m a child of Abraham, maybe you would say, I’m a Lutheran I’m a voting member of Messiah Lutheran Church, let me in. As impressive as that pedigree may sound it won’t gain you admittance through the narrow door. Some will even say I’m Christian let me in. Did you know 54% of Christians believe that salvation is based on good works? A name, a birthright or good works won’t get you in. Jesus says to those thinking such in verse 28 and 29: ***“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.”*** We are saved by Christ alone not by who we are or what we’ve done.

The third thing in the backpack is one that we don’t even realize we are carrying, but we all packed it. It’s a pack full of all our sins. All our transgressions of God’s holy, perfect and righteous Law ... all our sins of thought, word and deed ... every sin we’ve ever committed, sins of ignorance, sins of the past, sins of the present, sins of the future - All weighing us heavily down. Do you see that Door, do you see the (†) Man-Door? He’s Jesus and He bore the burdens of that huge pack full of your sins, 2,000 years ago as it was placed on Him. He took up residence on the narrow place of the cross to become the narrow door for you. Those sins became His and He was charged with the penalty of death and paid the complete price for all of your sins. Not only yours but also for the sins of the whole world. Any attempts to try and pay for our own sins are foolishness. Jesus has paid the price in full.

To enter through the narrow way is to leave everything behind. Our self-righteousness, our thoughts of worth based upon our earthly pedigree, and our sin. For the way is narrow, just wide enough to enter. The way is the width of a cross. The door is Jesus. The way is the width of a font, and the door is Jesus, The way is the width of a wafer and brim of a chalice and the door is Jesus. When you step through that door you will enter into the very presence of God. You enter in to Jesus where you can know without a doubt, that all your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, for through Him (†) alone you enter into life now and forevermore, in Jesus name, Amen and amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
AMEN!