Luke 13:22-30 (EHV)

STRIVE TO ENTER THE NARROW DOOR!

1. Cling to Jesus
2. Fix his Word in your heart and life

Do you remember this scene from the movie *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*? Indiana is racing to escape with the treasure and a big rock is rolling after him. He has to leap across a chasm. He has to hurry to make it back through the narrow passage before the great stone door closes him in forever. He dives to slide under the closing doorway, but his fedora falls off on the wrong side of the door. At the risk of being crushed, he reaches back and retrieves his iconic hat as the door slams shut. That may be the very essence of striving to enter a narrow door!

Although the story is not as dramatic or as stylish, Jesus is talking about the same thing in our Gospel. He speaks of a narrow door which is open only for so long. Then Jesus makes it clear some will find themselves on the wrong side. And once the door closes, it will not open again. How urgent it is for us to learn the lesson Jesus teaches today. His words invite us to STRIVE TO ENTER THE NARROW DOOR.

In our reading, a man asks: *Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?* This question may seem innocent enough, but Jesus’ response tells us a different story. The man who asked the question had a mistaken opinion about his spiritual condition. He was self-righteous and his question came from a heart that was proud, even cocky. He wanted to see how he compared to everyone else.

Did you also notice that Jesus does not really answer his question? Instead, he tells a story about a house: a big, grand, extremely nice house, the Master’s house. And the Master is there to welcome the guests. His invitation is open to all and many want to come. But there is only one way in. The only entrance is a single narrow door. All who want to join him must enter there. But time is short because once the master of the house gets up and shuts the door, you will begin to stand outside and knock on the door.

What is Jesus telling us with this story? This house is clearly a picture of heaven. What house could be greater than that! Isn’t that exactly what Jesus says: *In my Father’s house are many mansion; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you.* Who would not want to get in there? And Jesus, the Master, invites you, invites everyone.

But there is only one narrow door to his heavenly home. It is the Master’s house. He sets the terms and we must follow them. To enter, one must be perfect, without sin. But the Master also makes the door! He supplies perfection. He removes sin. He is the only one who could make such a door and you will not find any other entrance. But the Master has limited the time it stays open! The time we spend in this life is all we have to find the entrance. When our life ends or the Master returns again, it will be too late to make a last minute dive of desperation! What urgency needs to be there to strive to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.

And what happened in Jesus’ story? When the Master closed the door, many were still left outside. They ignored his urgent invitation. And when the door shut, the knocking and the pleading begin. L, open the door for us. We ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets - you know us. You were right here with us. Doesn’t that count for something? But whatever the appeal, the answer in the parable does not change: I do not know you or where you come from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!

So what does this parable tell us? Today there will be some left out who thought they would be getting in too. But who? Is it just those who deny Christ? What about those Christians...
who reject some or all of God’s Word? Or those who claim the name Lutheran but cut out pieces of the Bible in favor of popular vote? But thankfully that is not us, right?

Or does this warning knock even on the door of your heart? Is Jesus talking even to us? Can you say to Jesus: You taught in our streets! We have had the Gospel for generations. There are so many churches around us. Does that tempt us to take that Gospel for granted? How often are we truly striving to enter the narrow door? Does your heart grow complacent to the Gospel’s urgent call? Are you content to say: I visited you once in a while, Jesus? On occasion, I ate and drank with you. At least, I take what you say under advisement.

Do you see how dangerous that last statement is? It reveals of the true state of one’s heart! Who is not willing to take Jesus’ advice once in a while? But when it comes to striving toward the narrow door, making his Word the first priority of my life, that is another story. The world’s voice summons us away from the narrow door to many broad doors that are always ready to suck us in.

Where Jesus says: Understand the urgency of being in my house now in preparation for eternity, the world offers many distractions to keep us away. Where Jesus says: Understand this commitment governs every hour of the week, the world tempts us: Put in your hour or two on a Sunday, and maybe just once or twice a month, but the rest of the time is all yours. Where Jesus says: Understand this commitment requires your whole self, the world encourages us to act like a child of God only when someone else will notice or when it is something big or when it is convenient. But when it gets hard or it is just a little sin or no one is looking, how quickly we walk away from the Master’s house and back to sewers of sin. How often we put ourselves in danger of standing outside knocking and pleading, Lord, open the door for us.

That thought is terrifying! Clearly some will stand outside, even those who thought they were safe on the inside. How many of Jesus’ own people thought this way? As Paul says in Romans 9: They had the adoption as sons, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship, and the promises and the patriarchs. Will it be any different today? Heed the Bible’s warning: So let him who thinks he stands be careful that he does not fall.

But why does Jesus tell this story? Was it to frighten that young man with hellfire? Is it to instill the fear of uncertainty in his followers then and now? Was his goal to leave us dangling on the edge of damnation? Have you started to feel that way? Was that Jesus’ purpose in saying these things? That does not fit what we know about our Savior or the rest of the story here. Certainly there is a strong warning for us here, but we have to understand that warning within the context of the entire story.

What does Jesus want you to take away from his words? First, abandon any claim to heaven based on self or what you do. To use the words of the parable, you cannot make your own door to heaven. There is only the one door. That is only Jesus. Any other we try will lead to damnation. That also means abandoning the ways of the world. It only leads away from the narrow door. It means saying No to the natural desires of my sinful flesh and Yes to the Word of God. We call that repentance!

Most importantly, although the door is narrow and there is only one, recognize there is a door! The Master made the door and holds the keys. When he requires us to be righteous to enter, he gives that righteousness to us. When he requires us to be free from sin, he removes that burden from us. He made sure to cleanse us of every last sin. That is why he made his way to Jerusalem. That journey would end at the cross. He was going to make sure you are free to enter the narrow door.

Jesus wants us to be certain of his work for us. From the cross, he proclaimed his victory: It is finished! The work of salvation is done. He repeats the message of his love and
forgiveness to us so often. We hear it numerous times and in a variety of ways in his Word. Every time we come to worship we hear that message again and again as Jesus’ Words drown out the voice of the world. We begin each service **In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.** Those words remind us of Baptism. There Jesus washed your sin away and he gives you the right to approach him in worship as his own dear child. Today we have the joy of receiving the Lord’s Supper. Jesus gives you the proof of his love and your forgiveness: the very body and blood offered in payment of sin. Cling to the Gospel offered in Word and Sacrament! It leads you again and again to Jesus, the Door of heaven.

Finally, look at what is waiting for you! Look at those who are waiting beyond the door: **Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God.** That is not all: **People will come from east and west, from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God.** All those who cling to Jesus in faith will join in the feast of heaven. That includes those you know who died in faith. One day you and I will take our place at that great feast.

The urgency remains for us: strive to enter the narrow door which means cling to the Jesus, the Master of the house. Make that your first priority, always! Fix his words in your heart! Strive to follow them in your life! Trust that he is and will remain your narrow door to eternity.

Amen.

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