

**MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW DOOR!****Sermon for the 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, 2019****Luke 13:22-30**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Luke 13:22-30: <sup>22</sup> **Jesus was travelling through each of the cities and villages and teaching as He was making the journey to Jerusalem.** <sup>23</sup> **Someone asked Him, “Lord, are there only few who are saved?”**

**He told them: <sup>24</sup> “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door! For, I tell you, many will try to enter and not be able to. <sup>25</sup> After the Owner of the house gets up and closes the door, and after you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open it for us!’ He will answer you, ‘I do not know you or where you are from.’ <sup>26</sup> Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’ <sup>27</sup> However, He will tell you, ‘I do not know you or where you are from. Go away from Me, all you evildoers!’ <sup>28</sup> There will be weeping there and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and see yourselves being thrown out. <sup>29</sup> People will also come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup> Indeed, there are those who are last who will be first, and there are those who are first who will be last.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

**“Jesus was travelling through each of the cities and villages and teaching as He was making the journey to Jerusalem.”** Jesus had an appointment with a cross in Jerusalem, a journey that was hardly in a straight line. No, it was a spiritual pilgrimage interrupted by much teaching and several miracles. However, there can be no doubt as to the ultimate goal: Jesus would reach Jerusalem, the city where the salvation of the world would be accomplished.

As had often happened while Jesus was teaching along His journey, someone asked a question. In this particular instance it was, **“Lord, are there only few who are saved?”** This was not a question framed in order to trap Jesus, but was rather asked with genuine sincerity. Such a question about salvation was often discussed by Jewish teachers. However, the person who asked this question of Jesus had it all wrong. It’s not a question of how many are saved, but of how to be certain of one’s own salvation. It’s also interesting to note that while only one person asks, the answer that Jesus gives is in the plural. It’s like everyone there is leaning forward to hear the answer because they all want to know. Jesus answers all of them, and what He says is perhaps not the answer they were expecting. **He told them: <sup>24</sup> “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door! For, I tell you, many will try to enter and not be able to.”**

When Jesus says, **“Make every effort,”** we must first recognise that this is a command cast in a tense that implies ongoing action. In other words, Jesus says to *keep on striving* to enter through the narrow door. The Greek word Jesus uses here is the root for the English word ‘*agony*’. So what Jesus says is *“You all must keep on agonising to enter through the narrow door.”*<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the ongoing struggle is difficult and painful that lasts a lifetime. In our Second Reading from before, the writer to the Hebrews says that we struggle against sin, meaning that our war with sin is a constant struggle.<sup>2</sup> So also our salvation. This is one of the potential pitfalls if we assume that our salvation is past tense. Of course, it is true that Christ has accomplished our salvation, but the real danger is that somewhere along the way we may stop and give up the race. This danger is real for those who believe their salvation is guaranteed because they fall into a particular group. Such people will say things like, *“I’m a member of so and so church, or I was baptised, or I was confirmed, or I used to go to Sunday school, so now I’m sure I’m in.”* This is what those who **stand outside and knock at the door** in Jesus’ example are saying. *“Let us in, Jesus. We know you. Don’t you remember us? We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets. We remember hearing Your Word.”* The problem here is not that they are church members or that they are baptised and confirmed and took communion; no, the problem is that they are trusting in some past event or some past association with Jesus to get them into the kingdom rather than being terrified of God’s wrath against their sin and trusting in the gracious forgiveness of God through the sacrifice of Jesus in the present.

<sup>1</sup> This word can also mean ‘fight’ as the Apostle Paul instructed Timothy: *Fight the good fight of the faith* (1 Timothy 6:12).

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 12:4

No, salvation is God's ongoing action in the life of a believer. While we are in this life, where our battle is constantly against the world, the devil, and our own sinful flesh, we are in constant need of God's Law and the work of His Spirit to bring us to repentance, and are in constant need of His grace and power to receive and trust in the forgiveness of Jesus our Saviour. If any of us ever imagine that we've got enough or that we've done enough already, then we're lost. We are no longer trusting in Jesus; but in what we once did with Him. It's the difference between wearing a life preserver while the ship is sinking and remembering that you tried one on during the practice drills at the start of the cruise but are not wearing it now. The latter won't keep you from drowning no matter how much you go on about how nicely it fit you at the time. In the same way, if any think they can enter the kingdom of God by virtue of some past association with Jesus, the door will be slammed in their face and He will say, **"I do not know you or where you are from. Go away from Me, all you evildoers!"**

Here is the horror of eternity. It is only after it is too late - **After the Owner of the house gets up and closes the door** - that these poor souls realise their mistake. They are on the wrong side of the door. Instead of being inside at the eternal feast of the master, they are outside.

Jesus said, **"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door!"** While this command is one of ongoing action, we must also recognise that when Jesus speaks these words, He is, in fact, asking us to do something we cannot do. He is giving us a commandment we cannot keep.

Consider the explanation to the third article of the Apostles' Creed that Martin Luther included in the Small Catechism when he writes, *"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."*

When it comes to salvation, God does ALL the work. These words of Martin Luther tell us that God the Holy Spirit even creates and maintains the faith that receives God's salvation. When Jesus says, **"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door!"** He is giving us an impossible task. We cannot by our own reason or strength *make any effort to enter through the narrow door*, but because it is the Word of God and because the Holy Spirit has promised to work through the Word of God, the **Holy Spirit** will produce this effort in us.

The effort that Jesus speaks of is the work that the Holy Spirit does when He calls us by the Gospel and performs the miracle of faith in us. He works in us to produce repentance as we confess our sin and trust in Christ for forgiveness. With that forgiveness comes our salvation and eternal life.

The struggle comes because our old sinful nature hates the work of the Holy Spirit in us. When the Holy Spirit works faith in us, we become a battle ground in the war that the evil one wages against God. We join the Apostle Paul as he mourns over his sin saying, *"For I do not understand what I am doing. For I do not do what I want to do, but I do what I hate,"* (Romans 7:15). We live the life of repentance that Martin Luther described in the first of his 95 theses: *"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."* This is the struggle that comes when the Holy Spirit moves us through the narrow door into eternal life.

Jesus said, **"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door!"** These words further teach us that the door to eternal life is open. Jesus Himself opened it when He kept His appointment with the cross. As He hung on that cross in agony for us, He opened the narrow door, in fact, He is that door. The blood He shed forgives us all our sin. It gives us eternal life. It earns us a place to **recline at table in the kingdom of God**.

Christ's resurrection is the promise that we too shall rise. He has preceded us in order to prepare our place as He promised when He said, *"If I go to prepare a place for you, I shall also come again and take you to be with Me, so that you also may be where I am,"* (John 14:3). We shall be among the people who **will also come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God**, because all Jesus' disciples have a place waiting for them with the Father.

Dear friends, **"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door!"** It is open now, but the day is coming when, just as Christ rose to open the door, He will rise to close it. The door will close for many today, as death takes them from this world to the next. Someday it will close for you. Someday it will close for me. Which side of the door shall we be on?

Fortunately, the answer to that question does not depend on us. How blessed we are that Jesus Christ has saved humanity in all times and in all places. How blessed we are that the Holy Spirit delivers that salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to humanity in all times and in all places. For as Christ's saving work extends back in time to **Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets**, it also extends forward to include all of us. For as God's Word and His sacraments spread from Jerusalem to

east and west, and north and south, so **people will also come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God.** This includes people who come from our own part of the world.

Thanks be to the Father who has given us the kingdom! Thanks be to Christ who has striven for us on the cross, opening the door through which we enter the kingdom. Thanks be to the Holy Spirit who enlightens and sanctifies us so we can **“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door!”** Amen.

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

#### PRAYER FOR THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Heavenly Father, we come before You in prayer and praise, confident that You will hear our cries because You are full of compassion and pity, not easily angered, and show great love and faithfulness to every generation.

Bless the work of Your Holy Spirit among us through Your Word and Sacraments. Turn us away from sin in true repentance, and help us to look to Jesus for forgiveness and for daily grace to do what pleases You. Provide faithful preachers and teachers of Your truth in Your Church, and make Your people eager to hear and learn it. Fill us with love and trust in You. Save us in all the battles we must wage, and uphold us in all our needs.

Strengthen Christians throughout the world constantly to confess that Jesus is Lord, to Your glory. Empower them to proclaim that it is Jesus who rescues them from the punishment that they deserve for their sin. Give to each one of us all those gifts of the Spirit that are necessary for our witness to Christ. Fill us all with wisdom and joy to use those gifts for the good of all. Enable the light of the Gospel to penetrate the darkness of this world, so that people everywhere may rejoice in Your salvation.

May this Your house always be a house of prayer. Cleanse it of all unrighteousness, that it may be a place where Your glory dwells, Your name is hallowed, and Your Word is taught faithfully.

Keep the nations of the earth in peace. Turn people’s hearts everywhere away from war, terrorism, and other wickedness. We pray, in particular, for those who are our country’s leaders. Grant that our liberties may be kept safe, our laws upheld, injustice suppressed, and lawlessness punished. Forgive our nation when it turns from Your ways, and lead its people to true repentance. Bless all honest and useful work in industry, agriculture, education, science, the professions, and the arts. Show compassion and send us drought breaking rain. If you give us prosperity, let us never forget You.

May the words of our Lord Jesus be treasured daily in our homes, so that both young and old may grow in grace, and follow Him who is the way, the truth, and the life.

If you cause us to pass through difficult times, grant that we may cling to Your mercy, and seek your gracious purposes in them. Look in mercy on the sick, the suffering, the poor, the bereaved, the handicapped, and the unemployed, and hear their cry. Bless them with Your powerful love, that they may turn to You, to praise Your holy name.

Hear and grant these and all other prayers, O Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and rules, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### The 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 66:18-23

<sup>18</sup> “For I know their actions and their thoughts, and the time is coming to assemble all the nations and languages. They will come and see My glory. <sup>19</sup> I shall set up a sign among them and send some of those who have been spared to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul and the Lydians, who draw the bow, to Tubal, the Ionians and the distant coastlands, which have not heard of My fame or seen My glory. They will proclaim My glory among the nations.”

<sup>20</sup> They will bring all your brothers out of all the nations, as an offering to the LORD.

“They will come, on horses, on chariots, in covered wagons, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain, Jerusalem,” the LORD has said, “They will come like the people of Israel, who will bring their grain-offering in

ceremonially clean vessels to the Temple of the LORD. <sup>21</sup> I shall also take some of them to be the priests and the Levites,” the LORD has said. <sup>22</sup> “For, as the new heavens and the new earth that I am about to make will endure before Me,” declares the LORD, “so your descendants and your name will endure. <sup>23</sup> From one New Moon to the next New Moon and from one Sabbath to the next Sabbath all human beings will come to worship before Me,” the LORD has said.

Hebrews 12:4-29

<sup>4</sup> In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup> You have also forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not regard lightly the Lord’s discipline and do not lose heart when He rebukes you! <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one whom He loves and whips every son

whom He receives.”<sup>7</sup> Endure hardship as a discipline! God is dealing with you as with sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?<sup>8</sup> If you are without discipline, and all sons have undergone discipline, then you are not sons but illegitimate.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, we used to have earthly fathers to discipline us and used to respect them. Shall we not, much more, be subordinate to the Father of spirits and live?<sup>10</sup> For they used to discipline us for a short time as it seemed best to them. However, God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness.<sup>11</sup> No discipline at the time seems pleasant, but painful. Later, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness for those who have been trained by it.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, “strengthen the hands that are letting go and the weakened knees,”<sup>13</sup> and “make straight paths for your feet,” that the crippled limb may not be dislocated but may, rather, be healed!

<sup>14</sup> Keep on striving for peace with all people and for holiness! Without holiness no one will see the Lord.<sup>15</sup> Be careful that no one loses the grace of God, that a bitter root does not grow up and cause trouble, so that many people are defiled through it!<sup>16</sup> Be careful that no one is sexually immoral or is profane like Esau, who for a single meal sold his rights as the first-born!<sup>17</sup> For you know that afterwards, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected. Indeed, he had no opportunity for a change of mind, although he begged for the blessing with tears.

<sup>18</sup> For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire and to darkness, gloom and storm,<sup>19</sup> to the blast of a trumpet or to such a voice speaking Words that those who heard it begged that no further Word would be spoken to them,<sup>20</sup> because they could not endure what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.”<sup>21</sup> The sight was so terrible that Moses said, “I am very afraid and trembling.”<sup>22</sup> Rather, you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to tens of thousands of angels in festal gathering,<sup>23</sup> to the assembly of the first-born, whose names have been written in heaven. You have come to the Judge, the God of all, to the spirits of righteous people who have been made perfect,<sup>24</sup> to Jesus, the Mediator of the new testament and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.<sup>25</sup> Be careful that you do not refuse to listen to Him who is speaking! For, if they did not escape when they refused to listen to Him who was warning them on earth, much less shall we escape if we turn away from Him who is warning us from heaven?<sup>26</sup> At that time His voice shook the earth; but now He has promised: “Once more I shall shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”<sup>27</sup> The Words “once more” indicate the removal of the things that are being

shaken, as of things that have been created, that the things that are not being shaken may remain.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and with thankfulness serve God in a way that pleases Him, with reverence and awe!<sup>29</sup> For our God “is a consuming fire.”

Luke 13:22-30

<sup>22</sup> Jesus was travelling through each of the cities and villages and teaching as He was making the journey to Jerusalem.<sup>23</sup> Someone asked Him, “Lord, are there only few who are saved?”

He told them:<sup>24</sup> “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door! For, I tell you, many will try to enter and not be able to.<sup>25</sup> After the Owner of the house gets up and closes the door, and after you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open it for us!’ He will answer you, ‘I do not know you or where you are from.’<sup>26</sup> Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’<sup>27</sup> However, He will tell you, ‘I do not know you or where you are from. Go away from Me, all you evildoers!’<sup>28</sup> There will be weeping there and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and see yourselves being thrown out.<sup>29</sup> People will also come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, there are those who are last who will be first, and there are those who are first who will be last.”