

*The Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost*

August 25, 2013

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 13:22-30

*Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 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!' "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. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last." (NIV)*

*"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death"* (Proverbs 16). There is great truth in this wise saying from Solomon recorded for us in Proverbs. This is a truth Jesus confirms for us this morning when it comes to how many people think they will get into heaven. There is a way that seems right to people, but in the end it leads to death.

Have you ever asked people those important questions? If you die tonight how confident are you that you will be in heaven? Why are you so sure, or unsure, that God will allow you into His heaven? If you have asked these questions then most likely you've experienced the same thing I have witnessed. I have asked these questions to many people and have heard a wide variety of answers. The confidence level varies from person to person as does the reason for their confidence. The bottom line is people believe many different things about heaven and believe there are many different ways to get to heaven. So we would do well to listen closely, carefully to Jesus' words here. There is only one entrance into heaven. There is only one way. There is only one path to eternal glory. I pray our eyes are opened and our hearts are stirred to tell everywhere this very important truth about: **The Narrow Door to Heaven.**

Jesus traveled through the towns and villages on the way to Jerusalem doing His thing. He preached good news to the poor. He taught the people about God's love and about the forgiveness of sins through Him. He proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was near. As Jesus is teaching and preaching "*someone*" whom the Bible doesn't identify for us comes to Jesus with a question. "*Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?*" I don't know what you think about this but I find this question to be a little strange. This someone doesn't ask how a person is saved or even when God will come to save His people. The question is "how many?" While I find this question a bit odd it was a topic often debated by Jewish teachers. Some rabbis taught that all Israelites would have a share in heaven; others only thought the world to come was for a select few. Now this person puts this question to Jesus asking if only a few would be saved.

Jesus said to them, ***"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."*** Literally, Jesus says to keep struggling, continue to strive to make it through this narrow door. Did you hear that? Jesus talks about the narrow door to heaven. Only one person at a time – it is an individual thing not a group thing – and there is only one way in! This is an eye-opening truth, especially in the world we are living in today. Our culture of today tells us to except any and every teaching as equal or you are an intolerant and horrible person. The culture of today teaches that there are many paths and many ways to heaven and you can go down anyone that you chose as best for you.

Rather than listen to the popular opinions of the day, we listen to Jesus. ***"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 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!' '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."*** Do these words make you sit up a little higher in your seat and listen? Do they cause your ears to perk up and pay attention? There will come a time for every person when it is too late. The narrow door will be shut. If you have not entered through the narrow door you will be left out – forever. What an awful thing to be kept out of God's presence! How terrible to hear Jesus say, ***"I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!"*** How agonizing to see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets, ***"but you yourselves thrown out."*** There will be weeping there. There will be gnashing of teeth, an indication of anger or suffering. There is a real place called hell.

One thing that really sticks out to me is how many people seem surprised at what Jesus says to them. ***"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death"*** (Proverbs 16). There is a narrow door to heaven. And it is not through what we have done, not by good works. It is not through a general belief in God. It is not even for those who know who Jesus is and try to follow his example. Jesus says, ***"Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'" I wonder how many people will add "but I even went to church."*** I read a quote recently and can't remember where it came from but it said: ***"Going to church does not make you a Christian, anymore than sleeping in your garage makes you a car."***

The only thing that makes you a true Christian is Christ, the only way to heaven. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. The Bible makes it clear no one comes to the Father except through Him. Jesus is the gate for the sheep to enter. Jesus is the narrow door. The only way to heaven is through Jesus, Jesus, only Jesus. So more important than just coming to church is listening to God speak to you in church about what Jesus has done for you. And yes it actually does matter what kind of church you attend. You want to be in a church that preaches Jesus, for salvation is found in no one else. You want to be in a church that keeps pointing to the cross and proclaims what Jesus did there as your only ticket to heaven. You want a church that says on that cross Jesus' blood carved the way back to God for you. You want a church that teaches Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as the only path to glory. You want a church that doesn't allow any errors when it comes to the Word of God which

might blur this all important truth that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the narrow door!

While the door to heaven is narrow, what a wonderful reminder that it is open - open to all! ***“People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.”*** While the door is narrow because Jesus is the only way, Jesus has opened the way for everyone. There is not a single person in this world with whom we are not able to tell the good news. Jesus paid for sins of all on the cross. Jesus lived a perfect life for everyone. Jesus died and rose again to bring salvation to all people. We are able to tell every soul, ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16).*** I we pray we get busy proclaiming this message while the door is still open. There will come a day when it will be shut.

I pray we not only keep telling others, but that we too take to heart Jesus’ message, ***“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”*** It is an ongoing contest, struggle, battle even for us who by grace have found the narrow door. For we too have a sinful flesh that keeps telling us we can do it on our own, that we are pretty good people, that maybe our works can get us into heaven. We too have an enemy, the devil, prowling around like a roaring lion trying to devour us. We too live in a world that is going to point us to many other paths instead of Jesus alone. There will still be a way that seems right to man, but in the end leads to death.

This is why this is such a valuable lesson to have before our eyes the narrow door to heaven. Jesus is the narrow door. Rejoice because this door is open - as open as Jesus’ loving arms – the same arms once stretched out and nailed to the cross to get us into heaven. We will enter one day through Jesus and take our place with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God. We will join the heavenly banquet that will have no end! How awesome will that day be, dear friends! Until then I pray we keep focusing our eyes on the narrow door to heaven. I pray we keep telling others so that when we ask them if they die tonight if they will be in heaven they will be able to say with certainty Jesus is the way and these things are written so I know I too have eternal life in Him. Amen.