

*The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost*  
August 29, 2010  
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)*

From which direction did you come to get to church this morning? Did you travel in from the north, or west, or east, or south? How many miles did you travel to get here? What obstacles or things did go through on your way? Was there traffic or construction? Did you have to cross over a river? Did you go through mostly city or country? We have some people who live just around the corner or across the street, and others that have to log on some pretty good miles to make it here by 10a.m. for worship. How did you get to the point that Amazing Grace is your place of worship? Did a friend invite you, did a neighbor or coworker witness to you, did your family bring you up in the WELS to know Jesus?

The point I am getting at this morning is that each one of us might have come from different directions, went through different obstacles, traveled varying miles, have different backgrounds and history, but we are all now here seated together for worship. This is exactly how it will be when one day God's people are all gathered for worship in heaven. ***"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 we all here may have differences, when each and every one of us arrived we all got here into our seats the same way - through those doors right there. We all came in through the one entrance we have into our sanctuary. In the same way, we are reminded again today there is only one way into heaven. Listen to this important truth from God's Word: **Entrance to Salvation is Only through the Narrow Open Door!**

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, stopping in villages and towns along the way to teach, when an unnamed person asks a rather strange question: ***"Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"*** Instead of asking how or the reason a person is saved, this person asks if only a few are going to be saved. Perhaps this is because there were some rabbis in Jesus' day who taught that all Israelites would have a share in the life to come. But Jesus' teaching of repentance and faith in Him sounded so much different than the rabbis. So this person asks if only a few are going to make it to heaven. Jesus does not

give this person an answer to what he asks or wants to know, but instead stresses an all important truth all need to know. ***“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.”***

Jesus teaches a truth that flies right in the face of popular teaching and preaching. There are not many paths to God. There are not many ways into heaven. Heaven is not a place everyone will eventually get to one way or another. Jesus’ emphasizes the fact that there is a narrow door. There is only one way in and it is narrow. Many will try other ways but will not enter. So Jesus says make every effort. The Greek word is literally that of a continuing struggle or contest. The reason the struggle is so great is because each of us has a sinful flesh. Our sinful nature tries to take us away from God. It rebels against God’s will. It tells us that we are pretty good people who can do something to make things right with God by our own works and effort. Then there is also the devil prowling around like a roaring lion. He wants to devour our faith and lead us into temptation and away from the narrow open door. Then the world comes at us preaching tolerance of all teachings and with a message that you can believe what you want to believe and all faiths are the same and will lead to the same place.

So Jesus reminds us that it is a narrow door people must go through to be saved. By grace we know Jesus is that door through which we enter. Jesus taught: ***“I am the gate for the sheep”*** (John 10). On the night before His death, Jesus said to His disciples: ***“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”*** (John 14). The apostles learned the lesson well for they went into the world preaching: ***“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name (than Jesus) under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”*** (Acts 4). Entrance to salvation is only through the narrow open door and that door is Jesus Christ. Not by works or any merit on our part, not by anyone or anything else - only by faith in Jesus as Savior can a person be saved.

This will come as a shocking truth to many on the day of Judgment. ***“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.’*** Whenever the day comes when the door is shut there will be those left on the outside. They will plead their case but Jesus will tell every unbeliever that He never knew them. Some might be people who know who Jesus is, they might have even been churchgoers, they maybe even called themselves Christians by name. They will say to Jesus: ***‘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!’***

These are people who did not enter through the narrow door. They did not have saving faith in Jesus. They tried to enter another way. They may, because of their good works, have thought of themselves as first whether they lived in Jesus’ day or our day, but they will be last. They may be Jews who had special blessings and were the first to hear the gospel, but because they rejected Jesus as Savior they will be last. Jesus will say away from me. Literally, Jesus calls them *“workers of unrighteousness.”* They do not have the holiness they need to live with God. So they will be shut out of God’s presence forever.

Again this is another teaching that is unpopular and pushed into the background today. But the truth is there really is a hell. It is an awful, dreadful place. Jesus says ***“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.***”

Doesn't sound like any place I want to be? People crying and gnashing teeth either in anger or in suffering. Isaiah calls hell a place of unquenchable fire. The worst part about hell is being completely separated from God. How dreadful to be cast out of God's presence forever. No wonder Jesus says: ***"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door."*** One day the door will be shut.

But the good news is the narrow door is still an open door. That is the gospel message Jesus was proclaiming. Forgiveness, and peace, and salvation are found in Him. Jesus opened heaven for us by providing us the righteousness we need to live with God by His perfect life. Jesus opened heaven for us by taking our sin upon Himself. That's why Jesus was in route to Jerusalem. He was going to pay for and die for our sins. That's what Jesus did on the cross. Jesus opened heaven by His blood and sacrifice. Then to make sure everyone knows heaven is open Jesus' proved His victory for us over sin, death, and hell by rising from His grave. Jesus is the open narrow door.

A Chinese convert to Christianity explained this truth to people this way. He said a man fell into a deep pit, muddy and slippery. As he lay injured and dying at the bottom, *Confucius* looked in and said, *"My friend, I am sorry for you; if you ever get out of that place, take care that you do not fall in again."* Then the *Buddhist* priest came along. He too looked in and remarked: *"I grieve to see your plight. If you can manage to climb up two thirds of the way, or even half, I might help you up the rest."* But stuck, injured, and unable to move such advice was mockery. But then Christ came by. *Jesus descended into the pit. He lifted the man on his shoulders, carried him to safety, and saved him.*

Doesn't that simple story explain nicely the difference between Jesus' teaching and every other religious teaching in this world? Every other teaching tells us what we must do to be saved. But Jesus keeps pointing us to what has been done. Jesus saved us. It was His life, and death, and resurrection that opened heaven for us. All who enter through Jesus will be saved. The good news is that for now the door is still open. Tomorrow it may be shut. Tomorrow it may be too late. So turn to Jesus in repentance and faith today dear friends. Use whatever time the Lord gives to us wisely to listen to Jesus' Word. There is an urgency to tell others the good news too, isn't there? Make the most of every opportunity to point others to the narrow open door.

What a day that will be when each one of us have finally traveled through this earthly life to take our place at the greatest feast of all. We may arrive from different directions, faced different obstacles, we might have come from completely different backgrounds, but we all be at that heavenly banquet for the same reason. We entered through Jesus. We stood on the last day with a faith that clings to Christ alone. The question Jesus answers for us today is the most important one of all: how is a person saved? The answer is clear. Entrance to salvation is only through the narrow open door. May we believe this truth and preach it boldly. Amen.

