

Sermon Draft for August 24, 2025

Text: Luke 13:22–30

Sermon: “The Narrow Door”

Our Old Testament Reading points ahead to the time when all nations and tongues will be gathered on **“my holy mountain in Jerusalem.”** God’s will in the Old Testament was that everyone be with him on the **“new earth,”** which he will make on the Last Day.

In our Epistle we are reminded of the futility of traveling the road up the mountain of the Law (Mount Sinai) as the pathway to God. It is impossible and cannot be endured. But God has provided another mountain, Mount Zion, **“the city of the living God.”** This is the home of the one who made perfect the spirits of the righteous, those who have been sprinkled by the blood of Jesus.

Our Gospel continues the mountain theme. Jesus is journeying toward Jerusalem (the city on the hill, where we also find Golgotha). On the way, he is asked how many will be saved, only a few? Jesus teaches that the door to heaven is narrow, but it is open. Christ has opened it for all repentant sinners.

Luke 13 begins with the question about the Galileans who were slaughtered by Pilate's soldiers during the Passover Seder. Jesus does not focus on Pilate's sin, but on the Jews' and everyone else's, and says it is time to repent (v 5). He then speaks the parable of the barren fig tree, another reminder of repentance, with the idea that repentance means a life of fruit (v 9). Next, Jesus is criticized for healing a woman with a disabling spirit. Once again, Jesus calls the critics hypocrites, for their lack of repentance. In the two parables of the Kingdom, just before our text, Jesus compares the Kingdom to a mustard seed and to leaven (vs 18–21). Both contrast the small beginning of the Kingdom with its grand scope at the end of the age.

Carved over the door of a saloon on the *Titanic* were the words “Not even God can sink this ship.” Today that piece of arrogant blasphemy rots on the bottom of the Atlantic.

Many people show a similar audacity before God. They're quite confident that not even God could deny them a place in heaven, based on what they've done for him: ***"We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets"*** (Luke 13:26). We hung around with you, Lord, even came to church on occasion. You owe us! ***"But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'"*** (13:27).

What a beautiful, yet troubling picture of the Kingdom of God in our text! On the one hand Jesus describes this place as wonderful where we can ***"recline at table"*** with him. On the other hand, there will be many that will not be there, but cast out! It makes sense that when Jesus was asked, ***"Lord, will those who are saved be few?"*** he answered, ***"Strive to Enter through the Narrow Door."*** It makes sense because we've got to be perfect to use the narrow door, don't we?

God did say, ***“Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy”***

(Leviticus 19:2). This was the approach of the Pharisees in our text.

Holy Mount Sinai was a reminder of this holiness of God (Epistle).

Many are trying this way, either putting up a false front, or really trying never to sin. But they are never sure about their salvation, and, in fact, when we are honest with ourselves, we know we are not good enough (v 24b).

If being perfect is the way to enter the narrow door, then no one can enter! ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”***

(Romans 3:23). So, maybe the door is narrow because we’ve got to try really hard to be good enough to use the narrow door, don’t we?

After all, no one’s perfect, and it can’t be that no one can enter into the Kingdom of God.

It must be that we need to ***“strive”*** in order to succeed through this door. But what is the minimum effort required? How could you and I be sure we have reached the level of acceptance? Isn’t this just a type of universalism?

Try our best it is the new religion of our day. But just trying our best, that is, just seeing Jesus as a great example or teacher for us to copy or learn from, isn't enough.

“Then we will say, ***‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets’***” (v 26). ***“He will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from’***” (v 27). ***“Away from me, all you evildoers”*** (v 27). All our works, apart from Christ, are filthy rags.

But if we can't go through the narrow door by trying to be perfect, even with our best effort, who, then, can be saved? **We have to be a sinner to use the narrow door.** It's true, we cannot go into the holy presence of God covered with our sin. But that's exactly why Jesus came to earth in our flesh (v 30). He who was the first, one with the Father, became last for us. Jesus, who is the door (John 10:7–9), took our sins upon himself as we pass through him in our Baptism.

Jesus took our sinfulness and carried it into the presence of God the Father and was damned in our place on Mount Calvary.

Thus, we begin our Divine Service by admitting that our old Adam needs to be drowned daily and by remembering our union with Christ in our Baptism. Thus, we enter the holy sanctuary of the Divine Service as sinners confessing our sins and hearing the absolution of Christ himself. Thus, we come to the Lord's Table as sinners who are worthy not because of fasting or bodily preparation, but by having faith in Christ's words ***"given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."*** "Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: ***'forgiveness of sins'***" (Luther's Small Catechism).

We can be sure that we will be among those "few" in our text. We will be among those from the east, west, north, south, reclining at table with Christ in his Kingdom. We can be sure of that because we are already in his Kingdom right now.

We, who admit that we are sinners already now wear the robe of Christ's righteousness and are the first in God's sight.

Let us thank God that, once again, he has reminded us of the seriousness of our sinful condition. More than that, he has rescued us from this hopeless situation in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ's invitation to recline at his table in the Kingdom of God has been extended to all. By his grace we come as his dear forgiven children to his presence in the Holy Supper now, and we confidently look forward to seeing him face-to-face in the feast to come!

Amen