

Sermon Draft

Text: Luke 13:22–30

Sermon: “The Narrow Door”

The theme of invitation and entry are scattered throughout the liturgical elements of the day. In the Old Testament Reading, Isaiah speaks of a time when the Lord will *“bring all your brothers from all the nations . . . to my holy mountain”* (Isaiah 66:20). The Psalm speaks of the Lord calling out to the earth: *“The Mighty One, God, the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting”* (Ps 50:1). And he will “gather” to him all his consecrated ones (50:5). Our Collect begins by recognizing that *“O Lord, You have called us to enter Your kingdom through the narrow door”* and continues by asking God to *“guide us by Your Word and Spirit, and lead us now and always into the feast of Your Son, Jesus Christ.”* The Epistle, from Hebrews 12, echoes the words of Jesus in the Gospel to *“make every effort to enter through the narrow door.”* (Luke 13:24)

Every day we enter and exit doors. The door to the bathroom. The door to the house. The door to the car. The door to the store. The door to the office. And today, as you came to worship, the door to the church. But have you ever had one of those experiences where you came up to a door and it was locked?

I remember a couple of years ago I went out to get the mail and when I came back to get in the door was locked and I had left my keys on my desk. It's not a great feeling. I was getting ready to walk home when Bill Langstaff pulled in.

There's disappointment when the door is closed! I want you to keep that image of a door in mind today as we look at our text from Luke 13.

Our text begins with someone posing a question to Jesus: "***Lord, will those who are saved be few?***" (v 23). This was a common debate at that time amongst the rabbis. Who and how many are going to be saved? And even today, people debate this question. What's the standard for salvation? What about those who just live a good life? Will they be saved? What if someone never has a chance to hear about Jesus? Does she get a "pass"? Will she be saved? But Jesus brings it from theoretical to practical. Rather than asking, "***Will those who are saved be few?***" he essentially asked, "Will the saved be you?" There's a shift from the few to you. And that's where I want to focus our conversation. You are here. You are listening. And the question is, "Will you be saved?"

And so, Jesus said to them, “***Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able***” (v 24). Now, here with the image of a narrow door, I think he gives an answer to the theoretical question: “Yes, only a few will be saved. Many will attempt to enter and will be turned away.” So, let’s talk more about the narrow door. It’s possible that this is a reference to a small gate next to the main city gate where latecomers could enter. However, the door could also be a reference to someone’s estate hence, the kingdom of God.

Regardless, there is a narrow door. And Jesus says that it will take effort to enter. Perhaps this word needs some clarification. The word for “effort” in Greek where we get our word “agony.” It suggests that there is a level of striving and struggle in the Christian life. In the first century, the word agon referred to the Greco-Roman games, where men fought against one another. Paul uses this same word in 1 Timothy 6:12 to refer to our efforts to “***fight the good fight of the faith.***” There is effort involved in following Jesus.

I think of the classic book written by John Bunyan in the seventeenth century called Pilgrim’s Progress. It follows the story of a man named Christian, who is tormented by spiritual anguish.

A spiritual guide named Evangelist visits Christian and urges him to leave the City of Destruction and tells him that salvation can only be found in the Celestial City, known as Mount Zion. Along the way, he is tempted by distractions and shortcuts. However, he perseveres. There's even one point in the book where he is directed by the gatekeeper Goodwill to go to the "Wicket Gate," which is the beginning of the "straight and narrow" King's Highway. Later in the book, we see that Goodwill is Jesus himself.

Can you see the parallels to what Jesus is referring to here in Luke 13 and to our Christian lives. We struggle with the same temptations to take the easy way out, to take shortcuts, to get distracted, to give up, and to despair of life. And yet, Jesus invites us to persevere, to make every agonizing effort to enter the narrow door. And here's the Gospel contained in this: Jesus is the one who has fought off the forces of evil already for us, opening the narrow door to us. In Luke 22, the word "anguish," *agonia*, is used as Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane just hours prior to his arrest and agonizing death on the cross (v 44). That agony enables the door to be open to us.

And here's the reason why effort is needed: because while the door is open, the door is closing. And if we don't agonize, if we don't make the effort, the door will be closed. Jesus says in verses 25–26, "Once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.'" The point is clear: Don't ignore the open door.

Don't lollygag around. Don't spend your life getting distracted by the pleasures of the world. Press on. Make every effort to enter the narrow door.

The Good News is that Jesus has opened the door. The cross and open tomb mean this door is open too. But what we need to know at the same time is it's a limited-time offer. We are familiar with limited time offers. We hear about them all the time on television or in ads for all kinds of products. Or, even just in general, there are store hours. Not every store is open twenty-four hours a day. Maybe you've had one of those moments where you realize at the last minute that you need something from the store, only to show up and realize that the store is closed. There's that sinking feeling in your stomach. You missed it.

Perhaps you got there just a few minutes after it closed, and the employees are still in the store. So, you knock, and you say, “Can I still get in? I just need one thing.” But they shake their heads and say, “Sorry, we’re closed.” And so you trudge home disappointed.

We look at these words of Jesus in Luke 13, and I can tell you that there are going to be some people come the end of the world who are going to be disappointed. And they will plead with Jesus, “Open the door to us.” And they will make excuses: ***“We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets”*** (v 26). “We sat in your pews. We attended your church events.” And yet, Jesus will say, “I don’t know you. Away from me.” Rather than open, the door will be closed. And many will be turned away, while only a select few will be included in the feasting.

So, let’s circle back around to that question: ***“Lord, will those who are saved be few?”*** That’s the wrong question. The more important question is, “Will you be saved?” And if so, how can you be saved? Salvation comes through knowing Jesus. Remember the reason Jesus rejects those who knock? “I never knew you.”

And here, this is not just a “know of” someone, like I know the name of so-and-so. No, this is to know someone intimately, personally, to have that relationship with the person. Jesus has opened that door to have that relationship with you through his death on the cross. And in John 10, he’s declared himself to be the door, and that **“if anyone enters by [him], he will be saved”** (v 9). He’s laid down his life for you, to know you . . . and to be known by you. Yes the door is narrow and Jesus is the doorway, he is the way the truth and the life

And so, today, the door stands open. The invitation remains: **“Strive to enter through the narrow door.”** While there’s breath in our lungs, there’s hope for our souls. Don’t ignore the open door.

Amen