

August 22 2010 Sermon

Luke 13:22-31 22 He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 When 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.' 26 Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' 27 But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' 28 In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. 29 And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. 30 And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last." 31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

It is coming! The time is drawing near! The time is approaching to gather all nations and tongues. God has sent his messengers to the lands far away who have not heard his fame or seen his glory. They have declared and are still declaring his glory among the nations. They have gone forth to make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit is bringing in people from all the nations as an offering to the Lord, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries to the holy mountain, to Jerusalem. And there will be a new heaven and a new earth "and from new moon to new moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath all flesh shall come to worship before me," declares the Lord.

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, for by his blood he ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." And they shall come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south to worship God on his holy mountain and recline at table in the eternal banquet of heaven.

This is the mission of the church. This is our glory; to declare the glory of God to all peoples and all nations and all tribes and all tongues. Jesus said to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into the fields. He has sent his laborers. He has sent us to sow the seed, to fish for men, to cast out the nets of the gospel and to bring in the lame, the poor, and the sick from the highways and the byways to the marriage feast of the king.

And they are coming. Every day thousands are being baptized all around the world. More and more are confessing their sins and receiving forgiveness through word and sacrament. The news from the mission fields is exciting. The time of the harvest is now. And today we at Emmanuel are part of this mission. As we reach out to our neighbors, tell others about Christ, spread the word of forgiveness of sins, send pastors, missionaries, teachers and laborers into the fields, we are taking part in the great harvest of the King of Kings.

But, unfortunately, not all will be saved. Not all who knock at the door of heaven will be admitted. All are invited, but not all shall enter in. Jesus tells us to enter by the narrow door, for wide is

the door and easy is the way that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. But narrow is the door and hard is the way that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Sadly enough, many of those who enter by the wide door, think they are on the path to heaven. Jesus tells us that many will say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name? Did we not eat and drink in your presence and you taught in our streets, but I will say, I do not know you, depart from me into that place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

And to their great dismay, those who thought they were the favored of God because they were descendents of Abraham, will look up and their punishment will be to see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the prophets dining with Jesus at the banquet of heaven, but they will be barred from entering there.

That's how it is with human self-righteousness and pride. We think of ourselves as pretty great people. We think that we are the favored of God. We who have the positions of power in the church, the seats of honor at the banquet of worship. We seek the highest positions of honor and respect, of control and leadership. We deserve the praise of men for our service to the church. We are the descendents of Martin Luther, we have a great pedigree and the true doctrine. We have the highest and truest form of worship. We are the favored of God. But will we too look up one day from the abyss to see Martin Luther dining in the kingdom of heaven while we are locked out?

Jesus says those who are saved will be few. Many will seek to enter and will not be able. Strive to enter through the narrow door.

What is the narrow door? The narrow door is the cross of Jesus. It is not our pedigree as descendents of Luther. It is not our status, our honor before men. It is not our position in the church or our seat of authority. It is the cross. It is the humility, the suffering, the lowliness, the servant hood of Jesus.

The way of the cross is Jesus bearing our sins on his shoulders. Lowering himself to carry the sin of the world, then taking your sin to the cross and crucifying it. The way of the cross is that on the cross Jesus suffered the eternal punishment of hell in your place. He took your place in hell as your substitute. His suffering and death were the payment for your sins.

Therefore, his cross is your redemption. By his death you are purchased to be the people of God and set free from sin and death. On account of his suffering and death God will not take your sins into account and charge you with them on the day of judgment. It is not because of your status, your honor, your power or your greatness, but because of the suffering and death of Jesus. The narrow door to heaven is the cross of Jesus.

Therefore, take up the cross of Jesus. In Baptism your sinful flesh is being put to death. You take up the cross and your life becomes more and more like Jesus; in the shape of a cross. The first shall

be last and the last first. Those who consider themselves first, who take the seats of honor and the places of authority, shall be last.

But the last, those whose lives are shaped into the cross of humility, confession of sin, weakness, suffering and death shall be first. The cross is the narrow door that leads to eternal life. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Not the high and mighty, but the poor and lowly. The servant, the oppressed, the persecuted, the slave, the weak, the sick, the suffering. These who are last in the eyes of men, shall be first in the kingdom of heaven. For God "has looked on the humble estate of his servant. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty."

Do not exalt in your goodness or take pride in your righteousness. But humbly acknowledge your sinful nature and confess it to God. Then come to the heavenly banquet and eat the body of Christ broken and given for you, and drink the holy, precious blood poured out for the forgiveness of your sins. Here you are joined to the cross of Jesus and become partakers of his death and resurrection. Here at the Supper of the Lord, your life takes on the shape of the cross and by that narrow door you enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Here, in the time-space of this world, you transcend time and space and for a few brief moments are sitting at the banquet table in heaven at the side of Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob. Here in these few minutes on earth you dine in communion with the apostles and prophets, and with angels and archangels, and even Dr. Martin Luther. Here for this brief period of time you are sitting next to your loved ones in heaven, your father, or mother, or husband or wife or son or daughter who have gone first to the heavenly feast. And most of all, here you commune with Jesus, joining his flesh and blood with yours; becoming one with him. Holy Communion transcends time and space, for here at the altar you take part in the crucifixion of Jesus 2000 years ago and you share in the resurrection of the dead on the last day.

Here, at the altar in Holy Communion, you become one family, one body, one communion with those who come from the east and the west, from north and south who join you and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the company of heaven. Here you become one with all those thousands who every day are being baptized and coming to the holy city, becoming one family with Jesus Christ and all his brothers and sisters. Here the nations are gathered, from all tribes and tongues, and peoples into one holy communion of saints. Let us be glad and rejoice in the Lord.

Amen.