

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 14 -- August 26th and 29th, 2010

Luke 13:22-30

²²Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.
²³Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”

He said to them, ²⁴“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵Once 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.’

²⁶“Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’

²⁷“But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’

²⁸“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. ²⁹People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

³⁰Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

Dear Children of God who have been led to see Jesus as our only Savior, Amen

The day starts off like any other day. You begin to run your errands quickly making it from one place to another. You rush into the store. You walk to the receptionist desk at the doctor’s office. You drop off your children at school just like you have done a hundred other times. As you walk back through the parking lot to your vehicle you reach into your pockets and feel nothing. You frantically start searching for your keys. Your heart begins to race. Your stomach begins to develop what feels to be the biggest knot ever imaginable. Your walk quickens as you approach your vehicle. By now you are standing face to face with your vehicle as your eyes strain through the driver’s side window to see what you have inevitably realized to be your keys safely tucked in the ignition. Your arm reaches down with your last desperation hoping, just hoping that your door, any door is still unlocked. One by one, you try, and then try again. Reality now, sets in. You have locked yourself outside of your vehicle. As people walk by, your face beams of embarrassment. You try to pretend everything is alright. You try to make everyone believe that you just enjoy standing there. And while you do, you stand there gazing through the window wondering if it is really true that you locked yourself out. Now imagine that there are no cell phones. There is no AAA or Onstar to come to the rescue. There is no spouse or relative with an extra set of keys to be the hero that saves the day. There is no one to open the door for you. Your only option is to try and break into your vehicle.

You and I, and all people of all time, face an eternally serious problem. There is only one door into heaven and when Jesus closes that door there will be no way to open. Our theme for today will use that picture of the door as we look at the parable for today:

Theme: Jesus Is The Door To Heaven

1 He opens and closes it.

2 Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.

A generation ago, one of the more popular television game shows was “Let’s Make a Deal”. Hosted by Monte Hall, every show offered at least one contestant the opportunity to choose what was behind Door 1, Door 2 or Door 3. Behind two of the doors were nice, expensive prizes, while one door opened to a dud, like a live chicken or an oversized baby bottle. Of course, the goal for each contestant was to pick the door that revealed the best prize.

More recently, Howie Mandel hosts the game show, “Deal or No Deal”. Twenty-five briefcases, filled with varying amounts of money, were available for each contestant to choose, hopeful of picking the case that contained the largest amount of money. As each door of each case was opened, and the banker’s offers were revealed, each contestant could walk away with a little, or a lot, depending on chance and their risk-taking level.

Today, Jesus Christ wants to bring out something of a greater spiritual significance, rather than a game show, and speaks in our text of only one door. It is the door that is Jesus himself, for he calls himself **“the gate”** and **“whoever enters through [him] will be saved”** (Jn 10:9). It is the door that opens to heaven. It is the door behind which there is no sin or sorrow, no pain or problems, where the God of all grace resides and where he wants us to live for eternity.

To receive the greatest prize of heaven that awaits behind “your door for more” depends solely on Jesus. It is not a “Let’s Make A Deal” guessing game. It is not a “Deal or No Deal” game of chance. Jesus gave up his glorious home in heaven for a time and came to earth to fulfill his Heavenly Father’s plan for our salvation. Jesus determinedly kept all of the commandments in place of us sinful human beings so that we could be found righteous in God’s eyes through faith in Christ Jesus. Jesus gave up his life on the cross of Calvary in order to suffer our punishment for sin and to enable us to avoid the eternal suffering of hell. All that was needed for our eternal salvation and our entrance through **the narrow door** of heaven was perfectly completed by Jesus our Savior! Nothing was left to us or to chance!

So, if Jesus has done everything needed for our salvation why does he also tell us to **“make every effort to enter through the narrow door”** of heaven? One reason is he wants to teach us that there is another eternal option. There is a place called hell, a place of everlasting **“weeping and gnashing of teeth”**, a term of anger and agony. As described by Isaiah in today’s Old Testament reading, for those in hell, **“their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched and they will be loathsome to all mankind”** (66:24). Jesus tells us to **“make every effort to enter”** because, even though he won eternal life for all people of all time, there are those who will reject what he has done. Some will never believe in him. Others will believe for a time but then fall away. These are the ones who **“will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, [they] 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 [they] 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!’”**

The truth that Jesus could ever close the door to heaven is not accepted by many today. A recent poll taken among Christian teenagers revealed that 68% agree with the statement, “I follow my own religious and spiritual beliefs, but I think that other religious beliefs could be true as well”, while only 31% could agree with the statement, “I strongly believe that my religious beliefs are true and universal, and that other religious beliefs are not right.” One girl commented, “I believe whatever you believe is true to you and it really shouldn’t matter what other people think”. Such ideas are not only found among today’s teens, but are held by people of all ages.

Jesus however says that there will be a time when the door to God’s grace is eternally shut. It’s not enough to just go through the motions. It’s not enough to just be a good person. It’s not enough to just watch Jesus, to see everything that Jesus has done for you and say, “Well, that’s the most amazing thing I have ever seen and heard, but I don’t have time for that right now.” When the door to God’s grace is closed you just can’t say, **“We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.”** This is exactly what these people did who Jesus is warning. They were the very ones who watched Jesus feed the thousands with nothing more than a few pieces of fish and bread. They were the very ones who watched Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead in the Galilean town of Bethany. They were the very ones who watched the blind receive their sight and the lame walk again. They were the ones who lived in famous cities, like Jericho, hearing from their grandfathers and fathers about the day God made the wall of Jericho come tumbling down. They were the ones who saw, and witnessed, and learned about the amazing acts of God and who sat at the feet of Jesus.

It's a very real danger to find ourselves locked out from the grace of God. Because let's face it, keeping our grip on the Savior is not easy. It's much easier to rely on ourselves. It's much easier to put our spiritual life on hold, always thinking that I can make time for my Savior later. It's much easier to rely on someone else to train my children in the Lord. It's much easier to say that I know everything I need to know about God. It's much easier to avoid the conversation in the backyard with your buddies and your friends, why they haven't been in church for a while. It's much easier to not to talk to your child or your parent who is living with their boyfriend or girlfriend. It's much easier to sign your name to a legal divorce document than it is to work out your challenges and difficulties. It's much easier to keep everything for yourself. It's easier than you think to lock yourself out from the grace of God.

God does not want the door to his grace to be eternally shut. In fact, he sent his own Son to make sure that the door to eternal peace was open for us. Jesus bridged the gulf of our laziness, greed, selfishness, stubbornness, insecurity, self reliance and pride that separated us from the door of God's grace and he took it to the cross. Jesus rose from the grave to hold the door open to the eternal paradise that he has prepared for those who believe in him. **“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.”**

While it is true that **people will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God** and that **“people from every nation, tribe, people and language”** (Rev 7:9) will be among the saints in heaven, it is only those who believe in Jesus Christ for their salvation that will **enter through the narrow door** of heaven. **“Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved”** (Ac16:31), says the Lord. Nowhere does he say believe if you want to, or believe in Buddha or Allah or the next, best, latest and greatest god to come along. He commands us to believe in Jesus alone, for **“salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”** (Ac 4:12).

How then do we **make every effort to enter through the narrow door**? We need to believe in Jesus today and continue to believe in Jesus until the day we die. The Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Jesus through the power of his Word, so we need to stay connected to that so that we **“do not put out the Spirit's fire”** (1 Th 5:19). **Make every effort** by remembering your baptism daily. Rejoice that you were washed clean of your sins in the name of the Triune God. Know that you have been set free from the authority of Satan in order to do what Jesus would have you do. **Make every effort** by reading God's Word faithfully. It has the power to defend you against Satan's daily attacks against your faith. It holds the comfort and the strength you need in times of emotional distress, physical harm, spiritual affliction or mental anguish. It contains the knowledge you need to speak with others about the only way to heaven.

Make every effort by receiving Holy Communion regularly. Be reassured, through the body and blood of Jesus, that your sins are forgiven and that heaven is yours. Through these means of grace, God strengthens your faith so that you will always trust what Jesus has done for you and then you will be in heaven with Jesus forever. When it comes to the question, **Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?**, Jesus doesn't give us a number, but he gives us a name. Whoever is going to enjoy what is behind the narrow door of heaven will have to rely on him for the forgiveness of all of their sins and for the righteousness God requires.

The door to heaven is not found on a television game show. It is found in Jesus Christ who opens it for those who believe in him for their forgiveness and salvation and closes it to those who do not believe in him. **Make every effort to enter** by relying on, and rejuvenating your faith with, the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. Amen.