**Luke 13:22-30** Pentecost 11

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** August 21, 2022

*Luke 13:22 Then 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.’ 26Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ 27But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’*

*28There 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.”*

**Will Only a Few Be Saved?**

Dear Friends in Christ,

Summer is almost over! For kids and teachers it *is* over; has been for two weeks!

Let’s briefly get into the mind of someone on vacation. Imagine that you have a week off work and the two bracketing weekends, about nine or ten days total. Maybe you take a vacation, maybe a staycation, but here's the point: What is going on in your mind on day 1, on day 2? Sheer bliss and joy, right? Day 6?—well, that’s the first bad day of your ten day vacation because you suddenly realize, if you’re counting, that you are more than half way done. How about day 8, day 9? Now you’re feeling the stress. The last couple days of your vacation are half ruined because you know the big W is coming: Work!

That’s kind of where Jesus is in Luke chapter 13. It wasn’t the end of his vacation, but he knows that the worst of his work is coming soon and filling his horizon. It started in Luke chapter 9 verse 51 where it said, *“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”* So started his final journey to Jerusalem. Our reading in chapter 13 reminds us that we are now in the middle of that journey. In the first verse it said, ***“Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.”*** Jerusalem, where so many of the faithful prophets had to die, Jesus knew he would too. The clouds gathering around his future days and weeks were getting darker and darker.

Somebody who doesn’t know Jesus might think that must be why Jesus had so many tough things to say in these ten chapters of Luke. Dig through Luke chapters 9-19, Jesus’ last journey to Jerusalem, and you will find *a lot* of tough words, words seasoned Christians know well. Words like, *“Let the dead bury their dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God”* (9:60). Or *“Unless you repent, you too will all perish”* (13:5) Or, *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate… even his own life—he cannot be my disciple”* (14:26) We heard it in last week’s Gospel reading: *“Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three”* (12:51). In today’s reading he talks about weeping and gnashing of teeth. I’m not quite as happy go lucky on my last day of vacation. Was it kind of the same for Jesus?

Well, no. That’s not what this is about. He speaks hard words, not because he fears the future, nor because he has lost his patience with the people around him. Jesus speaks these serious words because he wants these people in heaven. He wants them saved. And so in these ten chapters of Luke, which includes the last two weeks’ Gospel readings and the next few, we hear Jesus speak hard-on-the-ears words. Just like a doctor warns a cardiac patient with really bad eating and exercise habits, Jesus speaks hard words because he wants them (and us) to live! To live!

In today’s reading, it was a question that brought the strong words from Jesus’ mouth. It wasn’t a provocative question. Not in the least. Jewish rabbis had the habit of allowing and discussing all manner of questions as they taught publicly. People were free to do what the man of our reading did. And so it was quite natural that ***“someone asked [Jesus], ‘Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”***

We are given no context for this nameless face in the crowd. We don’t know who he was or why he asked. The Jewish religious establishment taught that virtually all Jewish people would get to heaven (*Sanhedrin* 10:1). Had this questioner been listening to Jesus, comparing that to what he had been taught in the synagogue, and now thinking, “Let me clarify, Jesus. Are you saying that only a few people are going to be saved?” Or maybe he was looking at the weakening moral fiber of his nation and kind of wondering if anyone was going to be saved. We really don’t know.

More to the point, what would the question be in our day? If it was a question about heaven and hell and how many people were going to end up in each, what would the man on the street ask today?

First of all, I don’t think the average person these days would ask a question! We live in an age of remarkable spiritual arrogance. People don’t ask God questions any more. They say, “Well, this is the way I think it is…” To suggest they need listening ears rather than spouting their own opinion is considered more insult than bad form.

But if someone in our day *were* to ask a question about the percentage of people going to heaven I think they would say something more like, “Just about everyone’s going to get to heaven, right?” That is the assumption just about everyone has. Be a pastor and listen to people request that you preach at a funeral of a person whom you have never met, and who clearly lived apart from any church—in heaven right? Listen to people give their eulogies about their loved ones, and the assumption is *always,* “They’re up there looking down on us.” They may have been nice and helpful and kind, and on the basis of that and absolutely nothing else, “They’re up there in heaven.” Or the departed may never have darkened the doorstep of a church, probably didn’t own a Bible and scoffed at anything religious, but they’re up there in heaven, by gum! They may have made all kinds of raunchy movies, music and podcasts, but their fellow entertainers have the platform to tell all of us that they’re up there in heaven. That is the assumption of everyone all around us. “Up there looking down at us!”

What would Jesus say about that? I think he would say pretty much the same thing he said in our reading today: ***“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”*** Without issuing a judgment on the man asking the question, Jesus tells us unequivocally that many who think they are going to heaven, will not. He calls a stop to our speculation about how many people will be saved, and whether this or that person is in heaven. He redirects us away from questions about other people to ourselves, as if to tell us, “If I were you, I’d be asking, ‘Am I getting to heaven?’”

Now we should not press this into some sort of formula for being saved. We know that we are saved through Jesus’ saving work, not ours. We know that we are incapable of doing anything pure enough to win heaven for us, and must completely rely on Jesus’ righteousness. But Jesus’ words speak the truth that God’s people, saved as we are by Christ, are still engaged in a daily spiritual battle against the devil, the world and our sinful flesh.

The word translated as ***“make every effort”*** has in mind a great contest, a fight, a wrestling match. Not that Jesus wants us to be uncertain of our salvation, but on the other hand, to take it for granted, to not live like people who treasure Jesus’ gift, is like taking a friend’s love for granted. Through no fault of theirs, only our own, we can end up losing that treasured friendship.

But Jesus would paint the picture in still higher contrast. Why? Because this is his farewell tour. He has frequented some of these villages not just for the three years of his ministry, but for at least two decades of personal Passover pilgrimages to Jerusalem. He knows these towns, these markets, these paths. He knows the houses lining the route that are neat and tidy, the ones that are in disrepair. What’s more, as the Son of God, he knows the people who live in them. He knows how often they have heard him. His heart, while rejoicing in those who have heard and believed, is weighed down by those who have no more use for his teaching than the evening news—something you make small talk about. And he knows they won’t have another chance to hear him.

So Jesus continues with a parable. ***“[When] 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!’***

Jesus is not talking about a generic someone else. He’s looking the people gathered before him in the eyes and says, ***“You will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door.’ But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.”*** Oh, that we would have Jesus look us in the eye and tell us this! Wouldn’t it make us, for once, earnest and sincere in our struggle against sin! Wouldn’t it make us go to bed thanking God for the faith he has given us, and determined by the work of the Holy Spirit to hold onto and feed and live out that faith! Wouldn’t it make us a little more serious about the things that God wants us to be serious about! ***“Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’”*** And the owner of the house will say the same thing. ***“I don’t know you.”***

We know the house owner in that parable. It is Jesus himself. He will be the judge. He whose body bled for the sins of all the world will also be the one to condemn those who just plain don’t like the narrowness of the door, nor the struggle involved in the Christian life—he will condemn those who want to do it their way and who don’t want to be bothered for Christ.

Then Jesus pivots away from the parable and uses plainer language, still looking them in the eyes: ***“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”***—but not you!

Jesus does not speak a word of doom upon these people, but an appeal. Not all who have passed before us made it to heaven. Last week’s sermon reading from Hebrews encouraged us, *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.”* In the same way Jesus today urges us ***“Make every effort to entre through the narrow door.”***

Finally Jesus speaks words of his grace, ***“Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”***

This is not cover for all the poor and downtrodden, that somehow their poverty makes them better in God’s eyes. Nor is it a blanket condemnation of the successful and prosperous. *Some* of the last will be first, and *some* of first will be last. This is the continual reminder running especially through the Gospel of Luke that worldly ways of counting life are not God’s ways of counting life. Don’t stake your eternity on the world’s rewards or commendations. Many who do will sorely and eternally and only too late realize their miscalculation. And many who earn no approval or favor from the world will enter eternity to the acclamations of angels and the entirety of saved humanity.

Oh, let us make every effort to enter through the narrow door, the door opened through the blood of Christ, the prize that is, by God’s grace through faith, already in our possession. As the reading to the Hebrews reminds us, *“You have come to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.”* Treasure that! Amen.