

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, August 21, 2022, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 13:22-30

"The Narrow Door"

To me, it is just heartbreaking when I hear people say that 'there is more than one way to heaven' – or that 'Jesus is just one of many ways – but not THE way.' Let me share with you the words from Proverbs 16:25 which are so very fitting that say, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.*" There are people all around us who believe in 'a whole lot of things' and there are also many who *think* they believe in Jesus - only it is *a very different Jesus!* The Jesus, who is the only Son of God spoke plainly and with certainty that there is only one way to the Father. On the night before He died, in the upper room, Jesus said in John 14:6, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" In those words there is no room for interpretation. Let's face it - Jesus said it so you can believe it! There is no wiggle room to fit some 'progressive agenda.' The truth is that Jesus is the only way to salvation! Luke reminds us of this fact in the Book of Acts 4:12 "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*"

I truly believe that Jesus is the One who saved us and is the only way to heaven. If you don't believe that, then I don't see how you could possibly call yourself a Christian! My daughter Theresa, when she was much younger, often reminded me of one of her favorite Bible verses from Hebrews 13:8 "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*"

In today's Holy Gospel, Jesus was asked about how many people will be saved and He replied, "*Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*" (Luke 13:24) In John 10:9, Jesus unquestionably laid the way for us, saying, "*I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.*" Eternal rest can only be found in Him! Jesus further explained this in Matthew 7:14 saying that the way would not be an easy one: "*For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*"

When Marilyn, John, Theresa, and I visited Trinity School for Ministry for the very first time in October of 2001, by the way it was October 11, 2001 – one month after 9/11, we flew from Jacksonville to Pittsburgh, as we were advised by Bishop Steve Jecko of the Diocese of Florida, we were quite surprised. He had suggested three seminaries to us, including Trinity. We had contacted a large school in Virginia, whose catalog showed sprawling lawns and huge buildings. When we got to Trinity, in Ambridge, PA, we found several small buildings grouped together on a small urban piece of property. As we visited and prayed with the leadership during our visit, I kept getting the sense that this was a perfect example of a 'narrow door.' Needless to say, we spent three wonderful years there learning so much, and being in a wonderful community of believers. It is not the size that matters but the beliefs and faith that make the difference. A narrow door indeed!

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At the risk of repeating myself - Jesus is the way to heaven – He is not one of many – or an alternative route that complies with political correctness, or the culture of the day which allows inclusivity; trying to not make people feel left out. There is one certain thing: Jesus is the target of a modern agenda. Let me put it this way – if you believe all of that mumbo jumbo about many ways and who they think Jesus is – well – I have to tell you that you will spend your eternity searching for peace and for that Jesus who you think is as they describe him. Batter wake up before it is too late! Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:18 about believing in Him. I am not necessarily speaking to this group of people who got up early to come to church, but I am speaking to the people who are watching on the internet. I am speaking to their hearts and telling them how important this is. I want you all to hear these words of Jesus. He told Nicodemus, *“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”*

Knowing the one true Jesus Christ means salvation, but Not Everyone Will Go To Heaven: Sadly not everyone that even wants to go to heaven will. Getting into heaven has to be on God’s terms and not ours! In Luke 13:3 Jesus said, *“No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish”* There’s that word that makes some people uncomfortable – repent! In Matthew 18:3 Jesus told His disciples, *“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven..”* Another uncomfortable thought for some people is to change. People do not like to change. In Matthew 19:23-24 Jesus once again spoke to His disciples: *“Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”* Riches don’t always mean the coins in your pocket, but about who and what you put first.

The Apostle John warned us about non-believers and skeptics who would try to stack the deck with false evidence against Jesus. You might remember there was that movie a while back called ‘The DaVinci Code’ that did its best to show that Jesus was not the Son of God; and then there were people who were talking about all of those false ‘gnostic’ gospels that were brought out. For example, the gospel of Thomas and the gospel of Mary Magdalene. They were really written hundreds of years after Jesus lived on the earth. People present these things simply to confuse and cause doubt. In 1 John 5:10-12, the Apostle John said that *“Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”* If you want the real truth, then read the Bible!

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to Titus that speaks about these kinds of people, *“To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.”* (Titus 1:15-16)

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My friends, the clock is ticking, as a matter of fact the clock started ticking the moment the first nail was driven through Jesus' hand, and we do not know when Jesus will return and call the judgment. It is certain that we need to be ready. Going to church is not enough; being sincere is not enough; being a good person is not enough; being religious is not enough! Following is not submitting. Look at Jesus' words from today's Gospel Luke 13:25-27 "*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.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you; I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!'"* Here were people who had been following Jesus, ate with Him, and listened to Him, but may not have truly heard what He said or sadly it had no impact on them. Another reason might have been that following Jesus was just the popular thing to do, following the one who claimed to be the Messiah, and they thought they would be covered merely by association. Sadly, I believe we might find that kind of attitude in many churches and youth groups today!

Jesus said that a lackadaisical attitude would never cut it, and that we need to be alert and be ready. In His parable of the Ten Bridesmaids Jesus told of these women – they were unprepared – they wanted to borrow oil from the others – they didn't take it seriously - and they had to leave to buy oil for their lamps. When the bridegroom arrived – they were not there – and when they came later to the banquet the door was closed. They begged to get in – but they were told "*Truly, I tell you, I do not know you.*" (Matthew 25:12) My brothers and sisters in Christ, if you want a truly remarkable relationship with Jesus for all eternity - today would be the best time for you to repent of your sins, turning away from them forever and turn to Jesus Christ as Lord of your life and the door to your salvation - before the door is closed. Jesus said, "*No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.*" (Mark 13:32-33)

Jesus is holding open the gate of the Kingdom of God and urging people to enter. He said the door isn't very wide and it will take real commitment to get in. One day, not very long from now, that door will shut and then, it will be too late. Please keep in mind that to truly know Jesus Christ and to enter through the narrow gate, you need to seek Him and call on Him; Submit to Him - surrendering your will to Him; Share your faith in Him - making your faith in Him public.

Jesus, the narrow door, the 'sheep gate', as He has called it – is the entrance to the pasture of the Good Shepherd and I pray that the words of Psalm 95:7 will lift your hearts and lead you today: "*For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would listen to his voice!*"