

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, August 25, 2019, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 13:22-30

"Jesus, the Narrow Door"

Imagine that there is a concert, show or a sporting event that you really want to go to. You have your heart set on it – it means absolutely everything to you. When you finally get around to going online or calling for the tickets – you find that it has been sold out because you waited too long.

Think about a relationship that you have wanted to have with someone – either to meet for the first time, or to try to reconcile – and it just never happened. Mostly because you procrastinated – you put it off - or because you felt that you didn't cause the falling out, or you maybe were too shy or just not ready to take that step. For some people – that is just how it is before they take the step to know and love Jesus – accepting Him as their Lord and Savior in their lives. Whatever the reason, or whatever the cause – there should be no reason on earth that should stand in the way of eternity with Jesus.

The question that was raised in today's Holy Gospel of how many will be saved can hit you right between the eyes, and I think it is amazing that Jesus refuses to answer that question directly. Instead He gives a personal and firm warning to those who are doing the asking. In Luke 13:24, Jesus answers, *"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."* He tells them that the door isn't very wide, and it is going to take a concerted effort and commitment to get in; it is not going to be by chance or fluke. There is going to be a day when it will be too late. He gave this illustration, *"Once 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.'"* (Luke 13:25) God is giving Israel this last chance, through the work, and sacrifice of Jesus, Himself. He is the final messenger. It is clear that throughout time - they refused to listen to all of the prophetic warnings –from people like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Job, Joel, my goodness - from all of the messengers that God sent that we call 'the prophets.' Jesus was saying that If He is refused, there will be no further opportunity. The disciples in the Book of Acts urged people in Jesus' name to 'wake up' and save themselves by accepting the that Jesus is giving them. This to what Peter told the people on the Day of Pentecost, bold and just filled with the Holy Spirit. In Act 2:38-40, he told them, *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.""* Those words are true today too! *"Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."* Just pick up a newspaper, turn on any one of the news channels, it is not good.

I must remind each one of us that no matter what others, or the culture might try to convince you in this world is ok - there is only one way to eternal life. Throughout Holy Scriptures, messages are clearly pointing to one direction, to one fact. Listen to the words from King

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Solomon from Proverbs 16:25 *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”* I can remember a saying in the 60’s that said: “if it feels good – do it!” Some of you might remember that. That doesn’t hold true in the Kingdom of God. Jesus Himself said on the night before He died, when He was with the apostles in the upper room, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”* (John 14:6-7) Last week’s Holy Gospel and the sermon spoke about seeing the signs. There are lots of signs out there. Sometimes people see or hear them and respond and other times they are ignored – purposely or possible because you are unaware. You know you are driving your car and you put on the windshield wipers. You hit for the fluid and nothing is coming out. So you look for the place in town that has the best windshield wiper fluid. You go to Brooks Auto Parts. How do you know it is Brooks? Because there is a sign! Signs lead you to where you are going. Think of Jesus’ warning in today’s Holy Gospel and I want you to also think of a “road closed” sign. If you choose to ignore it – the result could be disastrous. I can’t help but think of that movie ‘National Lampoon Vacation.’ Chevy Chase and his family are driving in the desert and there is a big sign “Road Closed.” He didn’t think anything of it and they fly through the air! We don’t know what is ahead – so we need to pay attention to the signs.

Jesus is warning people that if they do not respond to His call, they will bring down upon themselves the judgment that ‘this generation’ has incurred. Those who wait to see what happens later, and those who then presume that because they once ate and drank with Jesus, and watched and listened to His teaching will somehow be all right, but they will find that there are no promises. They only promise that needs to be made is to ask Jesus into your life. He made it very clear that if they did not take the opportunity to accept Him – all bets were off. He spoke with a member of the Temple Leadership, named Nicodemus, who snuck in to speak with Jesus and ask some questions that pertained to obtaining eternal life and salvation. Jesus told him that you need to be born again. He didn’t quite understand how someone could be born again. Jesus told him that you need to be born by water and the Holy Spirit. Nicodemus still didn’t quite get it – so Jesus told him, *“the wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”* *“How can this be?”* Nicodemus asked. *“You are Israel’s teacher,”* said Jesus, *“and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.”* (John 3:8-11) Do you see the parallel with what Jesus said in today’s Holy Gospel warning and His conversation with Nicodemus? It is time to wake up and smell the coffee!

Jesus further clarified to Nicodemus about salvation. He said, *“no one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in*

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him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.” (John 3:13-18)

Just like the “road closed” sign – this could not be clearer – but yet people pick and choose from this message, leaving out the results of the so very important choices. You either make the commitment, believing and accepting Jesus as Lord, or you choose your own fate and the consequences of eternal separation from God. Just like with the “Road Closed” sign.

The promise, and warning, of Jesus is that the people of His day were eager to fight non-Jews, the Gentiles from east and west, north and south, who for centuries oppressed, bullied and harassed them – that they could very well end up in God’s kingdom ahead of them. You know what happened don’t you? We are Gentiles – we were called and ‘grafted in’ to the Family of Abraham, while there are Jews to this day reject Jesus, but one day they will come to Him – I truly believe. That is what He meant when He said, *“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.”* (Luke 13:29-30)

Jesus also is saying that no one is assured of automatic privilege, mean that some who are first will be last, and vice versa. Our moral and spiritual choices matter. Who you love, and who you serve. Our lives need to be with and about Jesus, the narrow gate, seeking His direction through the Holy Spirit so that we will not be misled. If our choices are not prayerfully decided through His help and direction, then it really is possible to wander past the open gate of the kingdom of God, only to discover later on, the depth of our mistake. The eternal choice belongs to each one of us. I choose the Narrow Gate.