**Luke 13:22-30 August 21, 2022**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 13 here re-reading these words. “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!” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We like to say what we have to say and leave it alone, but the more we have to say it and repeat ourselves, the more aggravated we get. We find it in Holy Scripture in Peter’s Denial in the Passion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. When others in the courtyard say that he is a follower of Jesus at first he just says, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Then the second time it ramps up. “He denies with an oath saying, “I don’t know the man!” Finally the 3rd time he calls down curses and swears to them, “I DON’T KNOW THE MAN!” The repetition brings the frustration, but also in many ways shows his guilt. I must admit to you all this morning I have been in this particular situation in my own life, maybe this has happened to you as well. You call a customer service line and finally get someone on the phone. You explain the situation, you have to tell them who you are, your address, your phone number, your pin or your customer service number, the problem that you are trying to get fixed, only to be transferred, and you have to do it all over again, only to get transferred again, and by the 3rd time of having to give your personal information and explain what’s wrong, you aren’t the most pleasant, especially when you’ve been told there’s nothing they can do. It is aggravating to have to keep repeating yourself over and over again, even more when all you’re hearing from the other side is weak excuses and justifications for their own actions. You know the truth and you won’t be fooled.

If that’s how it works in our own lives, in our own small circles of influence over our earthly possessions and earthly relationships, how much more is that true when it comes to God? The picture of salvation that we find in our Gospel reading is that of a narrow door. If you wanted to see what that door looked like literally it would be a door that is the cut out of a person, and that person is Jesus Christ. Jesus said it himself in John chapter 14, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” He is the bridge between us and God our Heavenly Father, but he is also the door by which we will be saved and cross from this world of death to the kingdom of life. It is not a wide door where everyone is streaming through it like a massive herd, it is a narrow door that is exclusive in the sense that it excludes all false ideologies and beliefs. A universalist sort of understanding of salvation that there are many roads to heaven and all you have to do is be on one of them completely falls flat when we see our Gospel lesson for this week and other instances in Holy Scripture. There are not many paths to heaven, there is one. And Jesus is it. That’s the truth. And the bigger picture of salvation is also addressed this week in how you get through that door, because knowing of Jesus is not the same as knowing that he is the only narrow door of salvation. Knowledge that a man named Jesus existed at some point in history is not saving faith. Just as knowing that a church exists is not membership in it. We do not have faith simply by being in the vicinity of a house of worship. Saving faith comes from the Holy Spirit working in our hearts for us to believe that Jesus is in fact himself, the Son of God, and God himself, the one who died to save us from our sins, to put it simply to know God and to believe in God is to believe what we confess in the Creeds as a starting point and it’s not just to say it but to truly believe it. Because you can’t fool God.

Jesus says, “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” Why not? That’s really the question that we must wrestle with this week. Why won’t they be able to walk through this narrow door if we serve a God of love and inclusion. If we serve a God as we find in our Old Testament lesson who has drawn to himself people from other nations and even made some priests! From Isaiah 66, “From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the Lord.” Prejudice doesn’t factor into God’s relationship with man for God created all and therefore loves all. The inability to enter the narrow door has nothing to do with where you were born, your language, your culture in terms of what you eat or wear, or how you look. People of all nations will be saved, we see the picture of it later from Luke chapter 13, “And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.” In our sinful lives there is fragmentation and division based upon these things, but not so in the kingdom of God, and so in our reflection of the love of Christ in what we say and do there must be no exclusion of those who are different from us. For God loves the entire world and we are called to do the same, but if God loves all then why are not all saved? And to take it a step even further, why would the number who are saved be few?

The answer lies in sinful assumptions. There is a wonderful line in the Psalm for this week from Psalm chapter 50. It can help us understand the sacrificial system in the Old Testament as well. God’s people were called to sacrifice animals for the atonement of their sins, pointing to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. They would bring or buy animals in the temple and they would be slaughtered for the sins of the people. But the false assumption would be that God in any way needed the meat of the animals that were being killed. God’s call for sacrifice had nothing to do with those sort of earthly needs. Hear the words from Psalm 50, “If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” God doesn’t need the flesh of bulls or the blood of goats, it’s not about the thing as much as it is the motivation behind doing it. God required a sacrifice but it was the thanksgiving behind it, which led to the comfort and assurance to call upon God in the day of trouble and to see their help coming only from God which is the evidence of their faith. So when we think of the salvation of those who sacrificed bulls and goats they were saved not by all the blood of the beasts on those altars slain, but they were saved by the faith in their hearts which were connected to the one who would sacrifice himself and be the final sacrifice.

But the assumption was that it was their actions of sacrificing which led to salvation which is totally wrong. And it was the assumption of those at Jesus time that just being around Jesus was enough to be saved. “We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.” Like that means something, that just because Jesus was around they would be saved. The assumption was that some sort of connection to something that involves Christ would save them. This assumption isn’t dead, it is alive and well in our own communities and even amongst those we know and love. It’s summarized in the simple difference between saying “You know Christ” and “You know of Christ”. But you also know what is truly in your heart, and your own lack of faith, and that you may hear the words spoken from this pulpit but you don’t actually believe them. And God knows the truth. You will stand before the Almighty God and plead your case, that you came from time to time, that you sat in that very pew, that you would listen to some Christian songs on the radio. There will be those who may even say that they ate donuts from that Church up on the hill, like that means something, like that in some way connects them to Jesus Christ in saving faith just because they supported something that a church did. Because they gave a few bucks toward some fundraising effort or they had a Bible somewhere in their house, or they were a member of some church somewhere at some time, and the list of assumptions goes on and on thinking they are saved based on all these other things that are not a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and reliance upon God for salvation. And it won’t matter. It is a chilling response from Jesus to those who seek salvation but have rejected him. “I do not know where you come from.” Jesus says. And when these flimsy excuses are used as justification for why God must do what man wants him to do, Jesus’s righteous fury toward sin shows itself in the ramping up of his response. “I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!” And there is nothing else to be said. Not then, but there is plenty to be said, now.

There is nothing to fear, of a narrow door, of a rejection from Christ, of dwelling in a place of torment where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, for you have been saved through the blood of Jesus Christ. You are his child. A child he loves, a child he cares about, which is why the writer of the Hebrews talking so much about how he disciplines you so that you do not think that sin has no consequence or that sin is of no danger to your soul. The fact that your life isn’t great all the time is a testament to his love, because you are not great all the time and therefore you must be humbled. But in your day of trouble, you can know that your cries of help are heard by the Most High, and he will deliver you. God is our strength, our comfort, our hope, our joy, and Jesus is the only path of salvation. It is a truth that we sing of beautifully in the hymn “Thee Will I Love My Strength My Tower.” God is our strength, our place of refuge, the one place in the world where we can feel safe and secure and know that nothing will harm us. “Thee Will I love my strength my tower, Thee will I love my hope my joy……Thee will I love O light Divine, so long as life is mine.” That relationship is more than just knowing that Jesus exists, that there is a belief system that relies upon Christ for salvation and knowing of it subjectively like it’s just one of the many options of salvation. Faith shows itself in truly believing that Jesus is your strength, your tower, your hope and your joy. And you can’t fake that. You can’t say to God that’s how you’ve always really felt when it’s not true. Love that is genuine shows itself in our actions, it shows itself in God’s actions toward us, in our life, in our preservation, in that we are still breathing and here and serving him. God is love, and we know love through God. We see the love of God in the work of Jesus Christ, the narrow door of salvation, the only answer to the problem of sin and death. Because someone had to die, and it was Jesus, and there is no other path of salvation. Which means we are saved only through him. And we rejoice in that salvation won for us, not a false salvation that we think we can win.

But we can’t only live our lives looking toward the salvation to come, our passage through the narrow door of salvation which is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We who know the truth must bring others to the truth through the Holy Spirit working in our hearts to dispel the assumptions that they have about salvation. We must love them enough to reach out to them. We must give them more than just a greeting, or a donut, or a bible, or a smile. If a parent didn’t care about a child they wouldn’t correct them, or teach them the truth, they would let them in blissful ignorance hurt themselves or someone else. They would look at a child heading toward disaster and just simply say, “Hey, it’s not my kid, what do I care?” But that’s not the example of love that we have been shown, and it can’t be our attitude toward those who we know are headed for disaster. We must speak the truth to them in love, and help them understand that eating and drinking in the vicinity of a place of worship is meaningless to salvation. That hearing of Jesus Christ is different from knowing Christ in a personal relationship where you call upon him in the day of trouble. May God equip us and enable us to do this and not be feeble or scared to speak the truth in the moments that he gives with those who weigh heavy on our hearts.

Repeating the truth can be aggravating, but it also can be comforting. When you are faced with trials and days of trouble, repeat these words and know you are loved and saved. “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” Repeat it when the world promises you help in other places, when you must dispel the lies of those around you, when even your own faith grows weak and you get aggravated and frustrated at the pains and worries of this world. Because you see the narrow door, but don’t fear it, you know you are saved by Jesus Christ, the one who loves you and the one who knows you.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.