



## St John Lutheran Church

1017 Montana  
Libby, MT 59923  
(406)293-4024

Luke 13:22-30

"The Narrow Way...what's it mean?"

**Jesus said, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open for us, and He will answer and say to you, I do not know you, where you are 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 you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' Indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."**

**"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence, or the confidence of things not seen." Faith is the wondrous gift of God whereby a person clings to Christ for his salvation... and He alone... the Very Son of God who gave His life in sacrifice some 2,000 years ago. Faith is the hand that receives the gift of faith from God... and it is the God given strength from this faith that would give men and women of history the motivation and courage to have given their lives in martyrdom... most dying hideous, even unspeakable deaths. Faith moved St. Paul and all of the rest of the disciples to drop what they were doing in life in order to take up the mantle of the Gospel and to follow Jesus. Faith is what has moved your heart to confess that... though there are many things about God you do not know or understand... one thing is certain... and this is that God's love for you in Christ is everlasting... and His promises to you are absolute.**

**Faith does all these things because "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the confidence of things not seen." And yet, faith is nothing... it is a filthy rag... a failed tool of man's desire to win heaven... unless it's object is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. None of us are saved by faith ... we are saved by grace through faith. Christ is the object of faith... faith is the hand that receives Him.**

**Concerning that hand that receives Christ you and I from time to time stop and wonder. It may be in a still moment at home when everything is quiet.**

**It may be when we are driving down the road ...and, if, but for a brief moment, the radio has been silenced. It may be when we are about to lie down to sleep... or it may be on a day like today when we have come into God's house to worship ... to hear His word and to sing His praise. Whenever it may be... from time to time we all stop and wonder about our faith... we all wonder about the hand that receives Christ.**

**It is just precisely in those times when we wonder about OUR faith... perhaps personalizing it a bit too much... that we grow fearful and worried about the faith that we have and whether or not it is a STRONG faith ...or even the RIGHT faith. Today, for instance, hearing Jesus' Words of warning about those who will say to Him "Lord, Lord" ... only to be told by Him, "I do not know you"... we perhaps wonder, in the depths of our hearts, if the poor soul who will hear those words on the day of judgment will in fact be us.**

**Indeed, from time to time you wonder about YOUR faith... and yet, one thing is for certain ... in that wonder you are not alone. A young pastor sought council from Martin Luther concerning his faith that he found to be rather rocky and unstable. At the moment the young pastor was downtrodden... because he was afraid that**

deep down in his heart he was having trouble believing the very things that he preached week after week. **Expecting to hear** some pious counsel from Luther as to what he should do about his doubts... **instead he heard** Luther proclaim, **"Thanks be to God, I thought I was the only one!"**

**All of us**, from time to time wonder about our own faith. **On the night** of His arrest Jesus sat at the table with His disciples and He said to them

**"Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me."** And then St. Mark tells us in his Gospel, that the disciples all began to be sorrowful, and to say to Jesus one by one, **"Lord, is it I?" "Is it I?"**

**Looking deep into** our hearts every one of us are left asking those hard questions about faith. **"Lord, is it I?" "Lord, in the end, am I the one who will betray you?" "Is it that for all time there will be but one Judas Iscariot, or am I a modern version of that forlorn soul?" "Strive to enter through the narrow gate (Jesus says), for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able." "Lord, is it I?"**

**Questions of faith** are certain to come because the faith that we have been given by God... **though it is a perfect gift... is kept** in these vessels of clay where sin still plagues us... **and the devil still assails us.** **Questions of faith** are best dealt with ...**not in the depths of the heart... but rather in the objective truth of God's Word and Promise.**

**There is a** narrow way of salvation and that way is Christ and Him crucified. **The way is narrow... not because** God intends to exclude weak and weary sinners from His kingdom... **but because** it is a way that is completely contrary and foreign to anything that man would ever devise for his own salvation. **St. Paul, in speaking** of the Cross... **said that** it is **"foolishness to those who are perishing."** **The Cross doesn't** make sense to the person who so yearns to contribute to his own salvation.

**You see, man's** way of salvation is the way of works and of merits... **God's way**, however is the way of Grace...**a free gift** **George Bernard Shaw**, the doctrinaire playwright, is reputed to have remarked, **"Forgiveness is a beggar's refuge; a man must pay his debts."** **People of such** a mind hold that their good deeds will conceal their evil deeds just as credit cancels debt.

**God's way of** salvation... **on the other hand... is the** way of Grace. **All that we** owed for our sins had to be paid... **but the** payment had to be made by Jesus Christ... **He was** and the **ONLY ONE** who could be the only fitting sacrifice to be offered up in our stead. **He is, as St. John** tells us, **"the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."** **"Now,"** says the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, **"Christ has appeared to put away the sin by the sacrifice of Himself."**

**And now, Jesus** says **"strive to enter through the narrow gate."** **If Christ is** the gate... **and His** way of salvation is the way of Grace... **then even** the striving to enter must be based on Grace. **To strive to** enter is finally then to let God be God in your life. **That is that** we do not reject what He offers in His Promise! **Our Lord said** through the psalmist, **"Cease striving and know that I am God."** **According to the Gospel** of our Lord Jesus Christ ...**even the striving for salvation has been accomplished in us by Him...He is the One who motivates us to accept Him...to trust Him...to believe in Him and what He has done for us! Without Him, as He tells us ..."you can do nothing!"**

**"To them** (St. Paul wrote), **to them** (that is, to the saints of God), **God willed** to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles... **which is** Christ in you...**who is** the hope of glory. **Him we preach... warning every** man and teaching every man in all wisdom... **that we** may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. **To this end I also labor**, Paul says.... **striving according to HIS working which works in me mightily."**

**My friends, it is Christ who works for you and in you. It is for you then...**

**by the working of the Holy Spirit through our Lord's Word... to simply be recipients of His Grace...receivers of what our Lord gives... vessels into which He is poured out.**

**As to whether** you are that open vessel that has received His Grace...**do not** look to the confusing signals of your heart...**or the** reasoning of your own mind... **but rather** to the water and the Word from which you were born anew... **and from** which God made all of these promises yours. **The things of faith ...upon which** you are to place your confidence...**these are** the objective things given by God to you.

**Few of you** were even aware of the happenings of your baptism... **and that... no doubt... by God's design...so that** you would praise Him for His work in you. **You are saved** by Grace through faith... **not because** of some decision that you made to follow Christ...not because you are worthy of God's mercy... **but solely** because of a decision that our God made to love you... **to claim** you as His very own... **having moved** you from death to life in baptism as He cleansed you of your every sin.

**This is why** our Biblical and Sacramental theology is so very important. **This is why** we are so defensive and protective and particular about our Scriptural teaching. **This theology...this clear** teaching from Scripture is itself a great gift of God. **Why?? Because God** knows we will doubt... **He knows** all that we face from satan and this world...**He knows** how our sinful nature (our Old Adam as we call it) works to cause doubt and fear. **Our Lord knows** how this world will try to change and marginalize what He Himself teaches us in His Word and what He gives us in us in His Church and His Holy gifts...**His Sacraments.**

**Knowing all of this... our Lord** in His Grace gives us His constant assurance through His Teaching and His gifts. **His Word and** all that it teaches...**this is** for our assurance...**for our** confidence. **His Sacraments... Baptism and** the Supper...**these are** given for our absolute confidence! **His Church...this is** His Bride and it is the Means by which He delivers His Gifts and His Life!

**If you doubt** whether you are saved...**look to** your baptism...**here you** were marked with the Cross...**made God's** own and given eternal life. **This is why** we have witnesses to that baptism...**this is** why the Church keeps such scrupulous records about baptism. **So you will** know that you have been saved...**so doubt** will be put from your mind and heart.

**If you wonder** if you are forgiven...**come to** the Supper where our Lord crosses time and eternity and He personally touches you with His Very Body and Blood...**He touches** you with His Very Life to forgive you...**to assure** you and strengthen you and comfort you. **This is absolute** and it is for your comfort, assurance and great benefit!

**If you change** or try to change what God teaches us in His Word. **If you try** to make the Holy Sacraments less than what they are...**you are** eroding ...**corrupting that** very confidence and assurance that our Lord wants you to receive. **Yes the gate** is narrow...**but that** too is for our benefit...**because that** narrow gate...**Christ's path** and His Gifts lead to eternal life. **The narrow gate** is Christ and He alone gives Life...**no one** else is able...**no one** else is willing...**Christ and Christ alone!**

**My friends, as sure as the sun rises on each new day the questions of faith will come. "Strive to enter through the narrow gate (Jesus says), for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able." Rightfully so, even the faithful do and must ask, "Lord, is it I?"**

**But from that** awaking of the Law... **the faithful** then... **by God's** Grace, flee to Christ...**who is the Narrow Way. In Him, the last... that is** the chief of sinners... **those who** least expect a seat in His Kingdom... **are made**

first... **and the** heavens rejoice and the angels sing and all doubt is dispelled. In Jesus' name. In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...

Amen.

Pentecost 14C

Rev. Eric M. Christiansen  
St. John Lutheran Church  
Libby, Montana