Sermon from Luke 13:22- 30

One of the criticisms of Bible-believing Christians is that we are narrow-minded. What Jesus said in today’s Gospel reading shows that what they think is a criticism is true, but not the way they think. When people complain that you are narrow-minded, they think that narrow-minded is bad, for a couple reasons. If your minds do not think the way theirs does, they think that you have never taken the time to learn what they think, or else you would believe it too. And that may be partly true. There are some things which Christians think are not very important, so we do not spend much time on them. That is a common human response. If you are a Cubs fan, you do not care much about what the Mavericks are doing. They in a different city and a different sport. But, if you love basketball and come from Dallas, you may think that Cubs fans are narrow-minded. But that is not totally bad. We do not have time to be interested in everything.

The other kind of narrow-mindedness comes when we know what somebody else knows, but we disagree with what they think. The Bible teaches the difference between right and wrong. If we know the ten commandments and trust the God who gave them, we shut out “murder, adultery, … theft, false witness, and blasphemy” (Matt. 15:19), and we narrow our focus to “whatever thingsare true, … dignified, … righteous, … pure, … likeable, …  reputable, … virtuous and … commendable” (Phil. 4:8). “But fornication and all uncleanness or greed should not even be named among you, just as is proper for saints” (Eph. 5:3), as St. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5. “For you know this since you know that no fornicator or unclean personor greedy person, that is, an idol worshipper, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. No one should deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the anger of God comes on the sons of distrust” (5: 5f). Unbelievers think that Christians do not know what they know. But usually we are bombarded with it by the media and the education establishment. Christians know all that. But the Holy Spirit convinces us not to believe it when it contradicts God’s word. So our focus is narrowed down to doing God’s will, and that excludes doing what God forbids.

Why do I bring all this up? In today’s Gospel Jesus says, “struggle to come in through the narrow door” (v. 24). Sometimes narrow is better than broad. What led Jesus to say this? Jesus “was traveling through cities and villages, teaching and making a trip to Jerusalem” (v. 22). The teaching part goes on in this reading. I’ll talk about His “making a trip to Jerusalem” at the end. “But” while teaching, “someone said to Him, ‘Lord, are those who are saved few?’” (v. 23). Jesus’ talk about “the narrow door” is specifically about salvation from sin and death. Eternal salvation is really important. Lots of people have widely divergent ideas about salvation. Other religions offer paths to take to get what they call “salvation.” But only the true God knows what “salvation” is and how people can be saved. So it was good that this person asked Jesus, “the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16), “Lord, are those who are saved few?” That is an important question. In my experience, a lot of people with Christian backgrounds seem to think that everyone is going to be saved somehow, except maybe some hardened criminals. “But” Jesus did not think that way, “He said to them, ‘Struggle to come in through the narrow door; because many, I tell you, will seek to come in and will not be able’” (v. 24). Yes, Jesus said, “many … will seek to come in.” Of course people would like to be saved from death and to come into the kingdom of God, whether they call it heaven or paradise or the resurrection. What normal person would want to go to hell, or even just die? God created us to live. There is something built into our human nature which finds death at least sad, if not scarry. Jesus spoke the truth: “Many … will seek to come in” “through the door” to be “saved.”

But seeking to be saved is not the same as being saved. God has to save us. It is better to “seek to come in” than not to care or to ignore God or to hide from Him. But if you are seeking in the wrong place, you will not find the true God or His salvation. Seeking for salvation is kind of like the old TV show “Let’s make a deal,” where in the end there were three doors, and only one had the really valuable prize, and the other two would have been better off not even to try to get it. There are lots of wrong doors which have the wrong ways to be saved behind them. If you know of people who claim to be seeking for salvation, you need to show them the right door.

And it should be easy for us to show anybody the right door to salvation. In John chapter 10 Jesus said,

“Truly, truly I say to you that I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and bandits; however, the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door; if someone comes in through Me, he will be saved and will come in and come out and find pasture. The thief does not come except that he might steal and slaughter and ruin; I came in order that they would have life and have itabundantly.” (John 10:7-10)

We want to be saved from the thief, the devil, who wants to steal us from God and kill us and ruin our lives here on earth and for eternity. Jesus said that He is the door to be saved from all of that. He “came in order that [we] would have life and” not just be survive but “have it abundantly.” Jesus is the one door to life with God. That makes the door narrow. There are not many ways to salvation. There is only one. Others who seek for eternal life may be seeking what other religions have to say. Jesus says that they will not help. Their ways do not lead to eternal life with God. Jesus said, “I am the door.” And He proved what He said. I’ll get to that in a couple minutes.

If you are in this church, someone has showed you the right door. But do not just assume that since you have come through the door of the church that you are saved. In a sense a truly Christian church is a door to the door. But do not just sit at the door. Jesus said, “Struggle to come in through the narrow door” (v. 24). That is God’s message to each of us.

Jesus illustrated what he meant in verses 25-28:

“After the Master of the house gets up and locks up the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock on the door saying, ‘Lord, open for us,’ and in response He will say to you, ‘I do not know you. Where are you from?’ 26then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your sight, and You taught in our streets.’  27And He will say, ‘I say to you, I do not know you. Where are you from? Stay away from Me, all who work at unrighteousness.’  28There there will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth, whenever you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you being tossed outside.”

The people who were listening to Jesus had come to the right door to be saved from sin, death, and the devil. The person who asked Him “Lord, are those who are saved few,” called Jesus “Lord.” He knew that Jesus had special authority over him. Jesus is “the Master of the house,” “the house of the LORD” (Ps. 23:6). St. Peter is not the one who lets people into “heaven’s gates.” Jesus is. Jesus is the door, and Jesus said that a time will come when “the Master of the house gets up and locks up the door.” When is that? It is one of three times: either 1) the day of your death, or 2) the day of Jesus’ return in judgment, whichever is first, or 3) the day when a person shuts the door on Jesus by denouncing Him. Jesus called that the sin against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:29), when people were saying that Jesus is from the devil. Or as happened with Pharaoh at the time of Moses, when he knew that the plagues came from Moses’ God, the LORD, God of Israel, and Pharaoh said, “I do not know the LORD, and also I shall not let Israel go” (Exod. 5:2), God gave him many chances to repent, but eventually “the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart (Ex. 10:20). He locked the door on Pharaoh. But “God … wants all human beings to be saved and to come to a right knowledge of the truth. For there isone God, also one Mediator betweenGod and human beings: ahuman being Christ Jesus, who gave Himself asa ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:3-6). So we assume that as long as you are alive, Jesus has not locked you out, and there is still time for you “to come in through the narrow door.”

Jesus promised, “And they will come from east and west, and from north and south, and they will recline in the kingdom of God” (v. 29). Although there is only one, narrow door, people can enter it from every direction in the world. Jesus promised to people who come to God through Him, “Seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened for you” (Matt. 7:7). That is assuming that you “strive to come in through the narrow door” now, and do not wait outside until it is too late. Jesus concluded this topic of His teaching by adding, “And look, those who will be first are last, and those who will be last are first” (v. 30). Some who had the first chances to come into God’s kingdom through Jesus declined His invitation. But people like the thief on the cross next to Jesus, who came to believe in Jesus in his last hours of his life on earth, were among the first to enter paradise with Jesus (Luke 23:43).

But aside from Jesus’ saying so, which should be enough, how is anybody in the world supposed to know that Jesus is that one narrow door through which we enter God’s kingdom to be saved? Remember how today’s Gospel began: Jesus “was traveling through cities and villages, teaching and making a trip to Jerusalem” (v. 22). Already back in Luke chapter 9, which records Jesus’ transformation, He was talking with Moses and Elijah “about His departure which He was about to fulfill in Jerusalem” (9:31). Jesus was making a trip to Jerusalem for the express purpose of leaving this world through the door of death on a cross, but then coming back to life for forty more days to finish up His teaching, explaining how His death was “a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). Because by His death Jesus “took away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), He is the only possible door into God’s kingdom, the only possible “way” to “the Father’s house” (John 14), where anyone can have eternal salvation. Jesus went to Jerusalem, so that “based on His name repentance for forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). Now you know that Jesus is the door to salvation. So you know the only way to eternal life with God the Father. Jesus is a narrow door. But He is open now to usher you in to eternal salvation. Do not wait to go through this open door. “Struggle to come in through the narrow door.” Trust Jesus now, and always. Amen.