

11th Sunday after Pentecost
August 24, 2025
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church

Luke 13:22-30 (EHV)

He went on his way from one town and village to another, teaching, and making his way to Jerusalem. ²³Someone said to him, “Lord, are only a few going to be saved?”

He said to them, ²⁴“Strive to enter through the narrow door; because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. ²⁵Once the master of the house gets up and shuts the door, you will begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, ‘Lord, open for us!’ He will tell you in reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ ²⁶Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ ²⁷And he will say, ‘I don’t know where you come from. Depart from me, all you evildoers.’ ²⁸There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown outside. ²⁹People will come from east and west, from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. ³⁰And note this: Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

Have you ever seen a smallish dog carrying a really big stick? It is a bit comical. That little dog is so proud of the stick he has in his mouth. He trots around like he is big, bad wolf even though he is a tiny, tame pet. But he has a big stick, and he is not going to let it go. Then this happy little dog decides to take his stick through the gate in the fence. The dog never has trouble fitting through the gate. It is a wide gate compared to his width. But the stick is long enough to reach past both edges of the gate. So, the little dog gets quite a surprise when trying to bound through the open gate with that big stick in his mouth. He might try to push harder to get through the gate with his stick. He might turn around and pull. Very few will turn sideways so the stick goes through easily. That poor dog might be very frustrated and sad when he can’t get through the narrow gate with his stick.

Jesus tells us that the door to salvation, to eternal life, is narrow. Might there be something we are carrying around with us that is too big to fit through the narrow door to salvation? The door is very narrow, and no sin will fit through.

He went on his way from one town and village to another, teaching, and making his way to Jerusalem. ²³Someone said to him, “Lord, are only a few going to be saved?”

The question is a natural one. Jesus has been teaching many difficult things in this section of Luke. He warns against hypocrisy and against denying Christ when persecuted. He warned against greed and told us not to worry. He taught about his glorious return to judge on the Last Day and that believers would experience division even in their own families. He urged people to repent with teachings and parables. Surely many of those who were following were thinking the same thing. These are difficult teachings. Not many will be able to follow these teachings. One man bravely said what others would have been thinking. “Lord, are only a few going to be saved?”

Jesus answers yes with the following words:

Strive to enter through the narrow door; because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. ²⁵Once the master of the house gets up and shuts the door, you will begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, ‘Lord, open for us!’ He will tell you in reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ ²⁶Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ ²⁷And he will say, ‘I don’t know where you come from. Depart from me, all you evildoers.’ ²⁸There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown outside.

Yes, many will not enter, which means that only a few will enter the narrow door and be saved. But what keeps some from going through the narrow door? Jesus says that he doesn’t know them or where

they come from and calls them evildoers. Therefore, it is sin, the doing of evil, which keeps one from going through the narrow door to heaven. And it is not being known by Christ, in other words, not believing in Christ that prevents someone from going through the narrow door. Sin and unbelief keep one from eternal life. As I prepare sermons, I generally assume that most if not all of you are believers in Jesus. Therefore, we would also assume that unbelief is not going to keep any of us from eternal life. We believe. But Jesus' warning is for all in this church today too. For the doing of evil, sin, can lead one back into unbelief. If we refuse to repent and drop a certain sin, we are like the dog stuck at the gate who refuses to drop his big stick.

As we examine our lives, what are you reluctant to drop? Pride might be the big stick for some. We are so concerned with what others think that we won't let them see us as weak, helpless, wretched sinners. Instead, we only show people our good side. We brag, maybe embellishing our good deeds to make ourselves look even better. We might get into the habit of half truths and lies to cover our sins, so others say things about us like, "I hope my child grows up to be just like you." Pride is difficult to drop because it becomes our identity. To admit that we are a lost and condemned creature who sins every day against God and others is humiliating and ruins our reputation as one of the good guys in society. But getting through the narrow door to salvation with your self-centered pride is like a little dog trying to get through the gate with a Sequoia tree. It doesn't matter which way you turn; the door is too narrow for your pride. Drop it and repent in humility every day.

Maybe the stick we carry is sin that has become so comfortable that we don't even try to get rid of it anymore. Vulgar and obscene language from our mouths that may have shocked us at one time is uttered without much thought or remorse. Millions in our world have become desensitized to pornography. If everyone is using it, it must not be that bad. No need to try and stop. No urgency to repent. Maybe it is gossip that rolls off our lips so easily as we talk about others in ways that are harmful instead of helpful. But we've done it for so long that we don't feel guilty afterwards. When any sin becomes so comfortable that we have no urge to repent, that sin is becoming a big stick that could prevent our entrance through the narrow door.

Some in Jesus' story objected to being left outside, "*We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.*" We might say something like, "I was baptized...I was confirmed...I've been a member of this church for decades....I am a WELS Lutheran...I've known Jesus for a long time."

Now, all of these are wonderful things. Being baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal life...to all who believe this. Baptism is not our excuse to sin all we want. It is the promise of forgiveness as we return to the Lord daily in repentance.

Confirmation is a great day when you confessed your faith in Christ and promised to be faithful to his Word and Sacraments all your life. It is not a reason to keep sin around like a pet.

Being a member of a Christian congregation is a wonderful blessing. Through membership we are united with one another around God's means of grace. We encourage one another. We work together to bring the gospel to each other and to those who do not yet believe. But having your name in a membership book on earth is not the ticket you need to enter the narrow door. It does not replace repentance and faith in Christ.

Being part of the WELS, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, is also a very good thing. If there was an English-speaking church body in North America that more faithfully held to God's Word in doctrine and practice, I would join that synod. There are others who teach and practice the same as the WELS, such as the ELS in North America, and dozens of others throughout the world. But being a member of one of these church bodies does not replace repentance and faith in Christ. I don't get to live in unrepentant sin just because my church body teaches the Word faithfully.

And knowing Jesus for a long time is great too. But don't begin to think of Jesus as your long time buddy who will let you get away with anything. Jesus tells us the truth about our sin and that holding

onto our sin will keep us from entering the narrow door. Repent. Drop the stick. Humble ourselves before our Lord Jesus. For he is the only door, the narrow door to salvation.

And listen to Christ's amazing promise:

²⁹People will come from east and west, from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. ³⁰And note this: Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.

Although the door is narrow, many people from many places will enter that door to heaven. Although there is only one Savior, Jesus Christ, people from every corner of the earth will be brought to repent and trust in Jesus. You don't have to be born in the right place at the right time. God's Son came for all people of all time and every place. You don't have to have the right parents or the right connections. Jesus died to forgive the sin of the world. You are covered. Everyone who drops their sin before Jesus and trusts that he died and rose to forgive them will go through that narrow door.

Some of those hearing Jesus speak these words had eaten with Jesus on the earth. How much better it will be to recline at his table in heaven for all of eternity. How much better to be at the table in God's eternal kingdom with all believers, rejoicing in Jesus our Savior whom we will see with our own eyes.

For Christ, who is worthy of all glory and honor, who is truly first among all, humbled himself to become the servant of all. He humbled himself to death on the cross so that we who are last because of our sins, may be raised up to eternal life. He took our sins away, so we easily fit through the narrow door.

Amen.