

Pentecost 11 / August 21, 2022
Luke 13:24
“Strive to enter through the narrow door.”

Did you ever wonder how Santa gets down the chimney? A chimney is a very narrow space and Santa could afford to lose a few pounds. In the old days the chimney led to the fireplace, which was a broader space, with a large opening. When I was a kid, the chimney led to the furnace, and I don't know he got out of there. I don't think I ever really believed in Santa Claus, but when I got old enough to think about it, things like that made it really hard to believe. It would be even harder to believe now because modern furnaces don't even have chimneys, just a vent and that's an even narrower space.

How do you feel about narrow spaces? Divers sometimes venture into narrow spaces in underwater caves and into shipwrecks to see what is on the inside. I saw a documentary in which a worker crawled into a narrow space inside a 4,000-year-old tomb, to see what was on the other side of an earthen wall. Would you crawl into a narrow opening, just to see what is on the inside? I'd be much too afraid of getting stuck. I think of narrow spaces more in terms of getting stuck, than I do as entrances to something interesting.

Narrow spaces are often designed as a deterrent to control entry. Turnstiles force people to enter one by one at a controlled pace. Narrow doors may deter some people from seeking entry. There was a gate in Jerusalem called the 'eye of the needle' that people entered with great difficulty. But rather than dangerous places, Jesus spoke of narrow doors and gates as good things as opposed to easy access entrances. In the Sermon on the Mount, He said, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few." In our gospel, Jesus urges us to "strive to enter through the narrow door." Rather than a place of danger or a deterrent, Jesus calls the narrow door a passage to life.

In the physical world, narrow doors may be a deterrent to entrance, depending on our size and the size of our fears. However, in our spiritual lives, the narrow door refers to Christ Himself. The door is narrow. He is the only way to the Father. The door is narrow, but entrance isn't restrictive. He offers Himself to all people as the way to the Father. We may have to squeeze, breath deep and tuck in our tummies to get into some tight places, but in order to enter into life through Christ, all we need do is put our faith in Him as our Saviour.

The door is narrow. Jesus is the only way to the Father. Some people believe all religions lead to God, just as the spokes on a wheel all lead to the centre. The Lord took issue with that belief in the very first commandment, saying: "You shall have no other gods before me." Even though all religions use the word 'God' in their vocabulary, each has its own conception of God and worships that god accordingly. Human religions seek a way to God on the basis of human actions. Every human religion has its own rites and rituals, by which adherents seek to access the divine. God, who makes Himself known in scripture gives us access to Himself in Jesus.

God spoke to ancient Israel through the prophets. God forgave Israel's sin through the sacrifices of the Levitical Priesthood. Israel had access to God through faith in His promises. The door was narrow. There was but one God and He received people who trusted His word and believed His promises. The door was narrow, but through Israel, God opened the door to all people. Israel's purpose was to bring the knowledge of God to the nations. The door was narrow, it led to Jesus. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me." The door is narrow, but God opens the door wide for all people to enter through faith in Jesus.

God opened the door for all to enter by giving Jesus to be the Saviour of all peoples. In John 3:16 Jesus said, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life." The door is narrow, but by the voice of the Church, God calls all people to Himself through faith in Jesus. In Acts 2:21 St. Peter said, "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." There is only one way. Jesus is the way; but the way is open for all to enter. There is only one door. Jesus is the door; but the door is open to everyone who puts their faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

The door is narrow in the sense that we bring nothing with us when we pass through, neither our sins nor our good deeds. We enter through Jesus. His blood and righteousness are all we bring with us. In the world, people believe they have to bring their good works into God's presence, to justify themselves and establish their right to be there. Some people believe that God will judge our evil deeds against our good deeds. If our good deeds

outweigh our sins, then we will enter life. If it goes the other way, we will enter eternal destruction. But that doesn't even work in human courts.

People charged with offenses against the law are found guilty or not guilty, on the basis of whether or not they committed the offenses charged against them. No one has a hope of avoiding conviction, if she or he offers the good things they did as a counterbalance against the offenses they committed. If you are ever caught speeding, try telling the officer your average speed was within the limit. Judgement in scripture is on the basis of our offenses. Our good deeds are not a counterbalance to our sins. In the presence of sin, good deeds are forgotten. The ancients said, "good deeds are written in sand. Bad deeds are written in stone."

The counterbalance to our offenses is Jesus' righteousness, by which our sins are covered, and our guilt removed. The counterbalance to our sins is Jesus' sacrifice, by which He paid the debt for our offenses against God's law. The door is narrow. We bring nothing of our own into the presence of God, only Jesus' righteousness. The door is narrow, we bring none of our sins into God's presence either. Jesus' blood takes away our sin. The door is narrow, but it is open wide for all people to enter through faith in Jesus and baptism into His dying and rising. He promises that all who believe in Him will be saved!

Our gospel began with a question: "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" Jesus responded by pointing the questioner to an even more important question, "will you be saved?" The most important question we can ask ourselves is "will we be saved?" Jesus told the questioner to "Strive to enter through the narrow door," In saying this, He is simply telling us to believe. How do we believe? We believe by holding Him in our hearts as our Lord and treasuring Him as our Saviour. We strive to enter by the narrow door, by remembering His promises and daily turning to His word. We strive to enter the narrow door, by returning daily to the promise of our baptism. We strive to enter by the narrow door, by gathering for worship, study, prayer and fellowship. We strive to enter by the narrow door, by coming to His table to receive nourishment for our spirits and forgiveness of our sins in His body broken for our forgiveness and His blood shed for our salvation. We strive to enter through the narrow door, by holding Him in our heart as Saviour and treasuring the salvation we receive through Him.

The author of Hebrews warns us against neglecting our salvation. He writes, "We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." In Jesus' illustration, many who said "Lord, Lord," are turned away when the door is closed. They drifted away. Although they spoke the words, their hearts weren't in it. As God said through Isaiah, "This people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." The author of Hebrews also said, "Today is the day of salvation." Today is the day to treasure Jesus as our Saviour. When we treasure Jesus in our hearts as Saviour, we don't have to worry about the door being closed on us. When we hold Him in our hearts as our greatest treasure, we are always ready to be received by Him, either at our physical deaths, or at the end of age. He is the way and through Him we have access to Father in peace in time and for eternity.

God bless us with His Spirit and draw us to close to Heart through faith in Christ Jesus. In Jesus' name. Amen