

Luke 13:22-30 (Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost—Series C)
“The Struggle is Real”
Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT
August 21, 2022

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is the Gospel Lesson from Luke 13:

²²And [Jesus] was passing through cities and villages teaching and journeying to Jerusalem. ²³And someone said to Him, “Lord, are those who are being saved few?” And He said to them, ²⁴“Struggle to enter through the narrow door, because many, I say to you, will seek to enter and they will not be able. ²⁵From whenever the master of the house should rise and shut the door they shall begin to stand outside and to knock on the door saying, ‘Lord, open for us.’ And answering, He will say, ‘I do not know where you have come from?’ ²⁶Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets.’ ²⁷But He will speak, saying to you, ‘I do not know where you have come from. Depart from me, all you workers of unrighteousness.’ ²⁸There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the reign and rule of God, but you yourselves being thrown outside. ²⁹And they will come from east and west and from north and south and they will recline at table in the reign and rule of God. ³⁰And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.

An eternal banquet feast in the new creation! An everlasting feast in the reign and rule of God we are sitting at the table with Him! People from all over—east and west, north and south, some last who will be first, some first who be last. But there at the eternal feast they will be, at the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom!

Thine the kingdom Thine the prize
 Thine the wonder full surprise
 Thine the banquet then the praise
 Then the justice of Thy ways
 Thine the glory Thine the story
 Then the welcome to the least
 Then the wonder all increasing at Thy feast at Thy feast.¹

¹ LSB 688:4. Text: © 1983 Augsburg Publishing House. Used by permission: LSB Hymn License no. 110000752

But before the feast, the master of the house shuts the door. The time to enter will have ended. The time of God's patient restraint will be over. "Lord, open for us." And answering, He will say, "I do not know where you have come from?" "We ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets." But He will speak, saying to you, "I do not know where you have come from. Depart from me, all you workers of unrighteousness." There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the reign and rule of God, but you yourselves being thrown outside.

The unnamed questioner asked Jesus as He was on His way to Jerusalem for His Passion, "Lord, are those who being saved few?" Jesus' response is one that redirected the questioner away from worrying about others to examining himself. "Struggle to enter through the narrow door, because many, I say to you, will seek to enter and they will not be able." In other words, "O questioner, will you be saved?"

Ask yourself, am I one of the many or one of the few?

Many people will seek to enter into the reign and rule of God through what Jesus calls "the narrow door." They will try and they will fail because they are not able to enter. Literally, they are not "strong enough" to enter the narrow door. But how hard could it be? Like a camel trying to go through the eye of a needle (Luke 18:25). It is simply impossible. Impossible for those who are rich and for anyone else to enter into God's reign and rule on the basis of their own works and their own righteousness.

Who is it that enters into God's reign and rule? Is it not the righteous? Psalm 118:20, "This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it." Jesus said in Matthew 13,

“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43 ESV).

To put it negatively, the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” (1 Cor. 6:9 ESV).

As we examine ourselves and ask, am I one of the many or one of the few, we also need to question ourselves, “Am I righteous?”

David states unequivocally in Psalm 143 that “no one living is righteous before [God]. (Psa. 143:2 ESV). St. Paul, quoting various Old Testament texts points out in Romans 3 that “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. . . . There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Rom. 3:9–18 ESV). Through Adam’s fall into sin, all humanity is corrupt and sinful. We are not righteous in and of ourselves. We are deeply flawed and spiritually sick. We cannot rely on ourselves to save us from sin and death. We cannot trust in our strength to make us right and fit for the kingdom of God. Many will seek to enter and they will not be able. “For by works of the law no human being will be justified [declared righteous] in [God’s] sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20 ESV).

Am I one of the many or one of the few? Am I righteous? Am I one of the first or last in God’s reign and rule? How can I know; how can I be certain?

You can know and be certain that you have a place reserved for you at the eternal banquet feast because of Jesus Christ. Your eternal life and salvation are not dependent in any way upon you. Paul Speratus (1484-1551) in his hymn, “Salvation Unto Us Has Come,” (555 in the hymnal), writes, “Salvation unto us has come By God’s free grace and favor;

Good works cannot avert our doom, They help and save us never. Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone, Who did for all the world atone; He is our one Redeemer" (emphasis added). This is the message of Ephesians 2, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8–9 ESV). Entrance into eternal salvation in the reign and rule of God is the Lord's own gift available to all people by His grace through the gift of faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, we are empowered to repent of our sins while trusting solely in the merits of Jesus who alone won forgiveness and salvation for all people by His death and resurrection. By grace, the narrow door is open NOW into the house in which the eternal banquet feast is to be celebrated.

NOW the door is open by grace through faith in Jesus. THEN it will be shut when the Last Day arrives. "Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2 ESV). Paul, preaching at Athens in the Areopagus, proclaimed, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30–31 ESV). Jesus, who suffered the death of all humanity on the cross, paid for humanity's sins with His own precious blood. Jesus, the only Righteous One, suffered death and hell for all unrighteous people. Jesus is now risen from the dead so that, by faith in the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus, we receive His righteousness as if it is our own. It is His free gift to us so that we might have a place at the eternal feast in the new creation at the end of days. Romans 3, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law,

although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified [declared right] by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, to be received by faith” (Rom. 3:21–25).

Now, then, is the time to struggle to enter through the narrow door. Now is the time to strain every nerve to enter. This is not the struggle to do enough good things in life in order to earn God’s favor. This is not a striving to please God with the way you live. Jesus did ALL the good things necessary FOR YOU. He kept God’s Law perfectly for you because you are not able to do so. Jesus pleased God as God’s One-of-a-Kind Son, with whom the Father is well-pleased, in His perfect life, and in His sacrificial death and resurrection for you. God the Father cannot be more pleased with you than He already is. Through the gift of faith in Christ Jesus, you have been declared righteous. You have been forgiven. You are made holy because you are covered in the holy, precious blood of Jesus Christ. “This is the LORD’S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes” (Psa. 118:23 ESV).

No, the struggle to enter through the narrow door has nothing to do with our works as if to earn salvation. The struggle by which we enter the narrow door is repentance. And repentance is the work of God the Holy Spirit in the human heart. He creates the change in us through the power and grace of the Spirit. Through the Gospel Word and in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, we are given saving faith, trust, that Jesus, true God and true Man, suffered, died, and rose again in our place winning our forgiveness, our rescue from death and hell, and our eternal salvation. We receive these blessings through faith according to the

Gospel Word and Spirit who delivers them personally to us. But when we have come to faith and trust in Christ and desire to repent of our sins while trusting in Christ for complete forgiveness, our sinful nature says, "No," and wars against God's Word and Spirit. That's the struggle of the Christian life, and that struggle is real. Paul relates this spiritual struggle to us in Romans 7: "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. . . . So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:15–25 ESV).

This is our struggle too! It is an ongoing and life-long struggle that characterizes the lives of God's baptized children as long as we live in this sin-filled world. Therefore, we cling ever more firmly to faith and the forgiveness of sins that are ours in Christ. By the power and grace of God the Holy Spirit, we daily die to sin and rise to newness of life in our Baptism. With sorrow for our sins and faith in the forgiveness Jesus won for us with His death and resurrection, our lives become a daily dying and rising against as we struggle and strive against the old sinful nature. But thanks be to God that we already have the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

What is the victory that overcomes? Our faith! (1 John 5:4). In our struggle against sin throughout our lives, we might not always feel like conquerors. But the victory does belong to us who believe in Jesus Christ. It is His victory given to us. It is His eternal life given to us. Jesus fulfilled the Commandments in our place. He made Himself our human Brother so that through Him we might become the children of God and share in His great family of love. And where do families often share that love? At a feast!

By the power and grace of God the Holy Spirit as He works through our Baptismal faith and the Gospel Word, we fight the good fight of faith. We repent of our sins. We receive Christ's forgiveness and new life. We daily die to sin and rise again in our Baptisms with the assurance that we are God's own beloved sons and daughters. We are sure that we have a place at His eternal banquet feast in the new heavens and earth because we have a place TODAY where we recline at His Table and eat His Body and drink His Blood, in, with, and under the bread and wine, for the forgiveness of sins, life, salvation, and the strengthening of our most holy faith. Brothers and Sister in Christ, the struggle against sin is real. But the victory over sin and death by faith in Christ is real too, and it is your victory. See you at the Feast! Amen.