



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School  
1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

---

**Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost**

**August 25, 2019**

---

**“The Master Knows You!”**

*(Luke 13:22-30)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“...and you will stand outside to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come 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 where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God” (Lk. 13:25-29).*

**Collect:** O Lord, You have called us to enter Your kingdom through the narrow door. Guide us by Your Word and Spirit, and lead us now and always into the feast of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God. Now and forever. **Amen**

---

In Italy, the crowds that come to see this museum or that cathedral are huge, sometimes overwhelmingly so. And the entrances, of course, are limited; security guards monitor and control the number of people who can gain entrance at any one time. So, you form a line and wait and hope to get in before too long. At least that's what most people do. There are always some who don't get the idea of waiting in line. It's not part of their culture, their experience, their expectation. So when the next group is being admitted, if you're close to the door, you have to watch because there will be some who will skip the line altogether and will, from the side, try to squeeze in. Some are fairly aggressive, jostling their way in front of an elderly couple. It was a little out of character, but once I put my arm out to pushy couple and said, "No, no, no, no. . . to the back of the line." They didn't understand English but they understood this (hand gesture) and seemed surprised that someone would thwart their admittance, even a little angry.

So it is in our text. Some, fully expecting to be admitted into the house were surprised that their admittance was blocked. They presumed to have priority, but they were not able to pry or jostle or argue their way in. The heavy, narrow doors were shut and locked.

Someone once asked Jesus, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" It's an interesting question and quite relevant. Thankfully Jesus doesn't play the numbers game. He doesn't say, "Just 144,000 will be saved", as some have said and are still saying in a remarkable bit of biblical misinterpretation and false prophecy. No, Jesus doesn't give a number. He simply says, "Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."

But that's not how we think about heaven, is it? As far as we're concerned the way to heaven is wide and straight and easy, and the gates are also wide, (and wide open) because Jesus loves

us just the way we are and is so accepting and tolerant. That's not what Jesus says, but it's the prevailing view of American culture. Americans have pretty much decided that hell doesn't exist anymore and we've decided that heaven is a place where all are worthy and all are welcome. But again, that's not what Jesus is saying in this text.

So, the first thing we have to do if we are to hear this text is sweep away all our contemporary assumptions, and really listen to his words. Jesus says the door is narrow. He says, "many will seek to enter through it and will *not* be able." (His words, not mine.) He says there comes a time when the master of the house rises to shut the door. (Apparently, he has that right. It's his house.) And in spite of all the knocking, in spite of all the pleading, in spite of all the demands of "Lord, open to us!", the Master will say "I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me!"

"Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.'" Have you ever noticed how strange that sounds? "We ate and drank in Your presence." Not *with* you, but in your presence, sort of like toddlers parallel playing, but not really playing with one another. "You taught in our streets." Not, we sat at your feet and listened to you and followed you as disciples. No. Clearly, they heard *of* him, but they don't really know him, and so he does not know them.

It certainly sounds to me that having only a casual interest in Jesus puts our eternal welfare in jeopardy. Frankly, that really scares me, because most of what I see in American culture today can *only* be called a casual interest, if that! What I see is mostly indifference, leaning towards hostility! What I see is a take it or leave it attitude. So, what I fear the most is that many will be surprised, (as those in the text were surprised), when they find the door is narrow and indeed has been closed, and there's no jostling or arguing one's way in. Many who presume to have priority access will be surprised and angered when turned away.

And these are people just like us. Then comes the pleading and demanding. "But Lord . . . we heard you teach in our streets." But Lord, I went to a Lutheran school; I know all about that stuff. They made me memorize all kinds of Bible verses and most of the small catechism and I got confirmed; I achieved the end goal of

Christian education!

“Away from me. I never knew you.”

“But Lord, every year I put up a tree and celebrated your birth, sort of, and every year I made sure I was there to celebrate your resurrection, sort of. And Lord I come from a long line of Lutherans and there have been Lutheran pastors in my family, and Lord, look at all the good things I’ve done for others, and how kind I was, and hard working, and how I always did my best.”

“Away from me. I never knew you.” “Without faith, it is impossible to please God.” Without faith, all our “righteous acts are as filthy rags” before the Lord.

But Lord, I was baptized. “Away from me, for I have said, ‘He that *believes* and is baptized shall be saved.’”

Somewhere in the book “The Great Divorce” by C.S. Lewis, he talks about the ghost of an Episcopalian priest, on an excursion from hell back up to earth, haunting a library to see if anyone is still reading the theological treatise he published. Apparently this theologian knew *of* the Lord, *about* the Lord, but had no relationship *with* the Lord.

“Strive to enter through the narrow door” Jesus said.

That word “strive” is precisely what so many people today are not doing. In the biblical Greek, the word strive here is *agonithsesthe*. Can you hear the word agony at its root, because our word “agony” is derived from this word, *agonithsesthe*: to strive. That is, the struggle to enter through the narrow door is not a casual business. It’s intense, deliberate, painful even.

“Strive!” Jesus says. Don’t leave it to accident or chance.

Strive! Word and Sacrament is not a matter of convenience, something you do if you don’t have anything better to do.

“Strive!” There’s something painful going on in that word. It sounds like a discipline, something you do whether you feel like it or not.

“Will those who are saved be few?” It’s a question we all ask at one time or another. We ask it as we wonder about friends who are barely connected to a church, or maybe not at all. We ask it as we pray ourselves to sleep worrying about our children who have drifted from the faith. We ask it as we notice members of this congregation who were once very active but

have since fallen off the map. We ask it while wondering if the Lord could possibly forgive us yet again. It's a question we ask as we contend with our own doubts and bits of unbelief. This Gospel lesson is a warning to us all: "Strive to enter through the narrow door."

Jesus turns the attention of this text to the Master, so let's do the same. It's not about us. It's about the Master. To be saved in this text is to be known by the Master. The question we should ask, then, is not how many will be saved, but rather does the Master know me?

In business they say it's all about who you know, but with respect to salvation, it's all about *who* knows *you*. And I'm here to tell you Jesus knows you. It's a gracious knowing, for sure, something that's not dependent on you, what you've done. It's dependent on the Lord, who knows you, and has known you for a very long time. Jeremiah 1, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." Psalm 139, "You knit me together in my mother's womb."

He knows you because he sees you, all the time. Again from Psalm 139, "O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely" (Ps. 139). Therefore he knows what you need, and has already addressed your greatest need. From John 10, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Despite your sin, he still loves you, forgives you and declares you righteous. Deut. 7, "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. He has chosen *you* out of all his peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession." He knows you because you are his baptized child, and because he has given you faith. Jeremiah 24, "I will *give* them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God."

He's the one who opens the door to you. In fact, he is the door. John 10, "I am the gate for the sheep" Jesus said. "Whoever enters through me will be saved."

It's about the Master then; it's not about us. It's about what he's done. So it's important to ask the right questions. The question is not, "How many will be saved?" but rather, "Does Jesus want to save me?" John 10, "I lay down my life for the sheep. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own accord." The question is not who you know, but who knows you. "I am the Good Shepherd, and I know my sheep." The question is not about what you've done to earn salvation, but to whom you belong. Is. 43, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."

We hear the Master saying, "Depart from me." That makes us anxious. But hear also the words of the Master in Luke 12, "Have no fear, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Hear the words of the Master in John 3, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Hear the words of the Master hanging on the cross when he says, "It is finished," which means there's nothing you need to do to finish it yourself.

It's not a matter of what you know or who you know. It's a matter of who knows you and what he's done for you. We teach little children to sing, "Jesus loves me this I know." Flip that around and it's still true. "Jesus knows me, this I love." Amen



