

+ Luke 13:22-30 + Love Speaks Precisely¹ + 13th Sunday after Pentecost + 18 August 2013 +

They said it was time to hit the road, so she went outside, picked up a stick and starting “hitting the road.” The lady for whom she worked told her to make some chocolate chip cookies, so she got a chocolate bar and potato chips and went to work on “chocolate, chip cookies.” She needed some help “pitching the tent” because it was too heavy for her to lift and throw all by herself. She didn’t get very far “rowing the boat” because it was so hard for her to drag the boats on shore to make a straight “row.” Do you know who I’m talking about? You may have heard or read one of the many stories about Amelia Bedelia, the lovable children’s book character who wanted to do what she was told and what was right, but in reality, she just didn’t get it.

Now for a children’s book character, that’s okay. It’s funny, but in real life, it’s no laughing matter. Has it ever happened where you thought you were doing what you were told, but in the end you were completely wrong? You just didn’t get it. Today’s Gospel lesson drives home the scary seriousness of that situation. Jesus warns us in Luke 13, ***“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because I tell you, many will try to enter and won’t be able.”*** He reminds us why **LOVE SPEAKS PRECISELY.**

In the Gospel Lesson we heard earlier, did you notice how carefully Jesus makes sure that everyone understands exactly what he’s saying? He was on his final journey to Jerusalem to face his death, but all along the way he took the time to reach out and teach the people. Jesus’ love moved him to be very careful in the precision of his words, because he didn’t want them to miss anything. He wanted to make sure that they got what he was saying, that no one missed his point, because confusion is so great in our world.

The question comes up in nearly every new session of Bible Information Class—that in-depth study of the basic teachings of God’s Word for those who are interested in becoming members of our church. It’s actually a great question, because it shows love and concern and a wrestling with the truths of Scripture. “What about those people on the other side of the world who haven’t studied or read or heard the Bible?”

For the full, Scriptural answer, you’ll have to come to Bible Information Class, but look at how Jesus responds to a similar question from the crowd. ***“Lord, are only a few going to be saved?”*** (NIV84) Jesus responds, “For a moment, don’t worry about them, but what about you? Do you get it? Do you know which door is the true Door? Or are you Amelia Bedelia-ing your way through a religious life?” Jesus makes the issue personal. “You, the one who’s asking the question about all those others, you ***make every effort to enter through the narrow door***, because there are so many out there who think they are, but will find themselves outside.”

It’s a scary thought, isn’t it? Much like today, the people of Jesus’ day just didn’t get it. In the section before our text, we see that Jesus had been turning their worlds upside down. He told them that the crippled woman, whom they figured must have been a worthless sinner, was actually a child of Abraham. Then he showed them how the synagogue leader, whom they thought had it all together, was actually ignorant about the true understanding of God’s Word. What? Their heads were spinning. If all that was changed, ***“Are only a few going to be saved?”***

The man, who asked the question, was concerned about how many would be saved, when actually he should’ve been concerned with how people are ***“saved”***. Looking at how Jesus responds to this man, it seems that the people didn’t understand what ***“saved”*** means. Sadly, all too many today don’t get it either, which is why we need to speak precisely. Jesus said there will be those at the judgment saying, “We’re saved, Lord. We’ve always been yours. We talked about you. We hung out with you. Your teaching was right there.” Yet Jesus twice has to tell them, ***“I don’t know you or where you’re from.”*** He calls what they had been doing ***“unrighteousness”***, saying they never had a relationship with him.

Now in Jesus’ day, the Pharisees and those like them did all the religious activity without trust, without realizing what that word ***“saved”*** meant. In our day, we clearly see two extremes. On one extreme, we see those who claim to be “spiritual, but not religious” saying that they have inner spirituality and don’t need to spend time in God’s Word or worship because it’s all about how you feel about God. Sure, it sounds good to be spiritual, and it’s easy to get caught up agreeing instead of calling them on their lie because there is that shred of truth, that it’s not about the formalities of church but about your relationship with God. The problem is calling yourself “spiritual” doesn’t really mean anything without the Word.

On the other extreme, we find those who are “religious, but not spiritual,” the ones going through the motions, doing what appears to be good, and following all the rules—even making up their own—but they don’t get that word ***“saved”*** either. Like those on the other extreme, they see no need for it. It’s hard to speak precisely to them too,

¹ Some of the thoughts and language of this sermon were received with thanks from WELS Ministry of Christian Giving’s 2013 stewardship emphasis – “Christ’s Love, Our Calling – Love Speaks”.

because what they're doing looks so good, but love speaks precisely. Of course, no one said speaking the truth would be easy, but Jesus says it's vital.

Think about it. Both groups think that they're enjoying life lying on the beach, not realizing that the quicksand is consuming them. They tell themselves that they're out for a calm swim, not realizing that they're actually three feet under water and they're drowning. It's like those life rings that you see on the wall at the hotel pool or on the deck of a ship. You think nothing of them until you're the one gasping for air, realizing that you are drowning in the water that's taking your life. Then, all of a sudden, you'd rather have that life ring and someone pulling you up by it than all the money or popularity or religiosity in the world. That's when you clearly understand the word "**saved.**" Your salvation is not about some decision you made on a certain day when you "got saved." It's simply the total reliance on that life ring, on your Savior, Jesus, who died on the cross to rescue you from an eternity in hell and rose to give you heaven for all eternity.

Thank God that Jesus gets in our faces today and speaks precisely about that—"you enter through the narrow door". You see, that same Pharisaical problem can overtake us as our religion gets caught up in building projects and budgets and busyness instead of the narrow door efforts. So easily that life ring of Christ simply becomes decoration by the side of the pool or a piece of jewelry around our neck or art on our wall, even when we so desperately need him for a real relationship with God.

That's what Jesus is saying. The way to heaven is narrow. It is only through the One who called himself the "**Gate.**" So see that narrow door, and speak that narrow door. Speaking the truth is vital, even if it's not easy.

In the modern town of Bethlehem, there stands a massive church called the Church of the Nativity. On its exterior you can see the arch from a grand entrance that once welcomed hundreds of worshippers through it. Then, sometime during the Ottoman period, the wide arch entrance to the church was filled in with stone. Now in its place stands what is known as "The Door of Humility," a door so short and narrow that you have to enter one at a time and every adult coming to worship there must bow before the thought of what is said to have taken place on that site. God became man. God's life ring was thrown out into the water of this earth. How gracious is our God!

That's why we sing, "***In Christ alone my hope is found...In Christ alone—who took on flesh, fullness of God in helpless babe. This gift of love and righteousness, scorned by the ones he came to save. Till on that cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied.***" (Christian Worship Supplement 752:2) That thought makes our hearts bow in thanks to our God because he has pointed us to the Narrow Gate, the only Way and Truth and Life, to Christ alone.

Even today God shows you the way. He invites you through the narrow door standing open in his Gospel in Word and Sacraments—through the waters of Holy Baptism, through the pages of his Holy Word, and through the bread and wine of his Holy Supper. There he has you see Christ, who saved you.

Now that we know what "**saved**" means, then what about that question at the beginning of our text, "**Lord, are only a few going to be saved?**" Jesus doesn't concern himself with providing the numbers that the man wanted, but he does say, "**They will come from east and west, from north and south, and recline at the table in the kingdom of God.**" Regardless of number, they will come from all over—from every background and every nation, every culture and every social rank. Do you know what that means? That means there is not a single person you cannot show the narrow door.

In fact, Jesus goes on and shows why you dare not try to judge by appearances those who need you to speak precisely. "**Note this: Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.**" Some who appear to have it all together like that synagogue leader, who seem like they'd be first in, may actually be found outside. Yet some whom we'd expect to not have a chance like that crippled woman, by the miracle of God's grace, will be first, because it's never about what we do or who we are, but about what our God has done for us through his Son Jesus Christ.

The stakes are high. The road is wide open for confusion about what church is all about or misunderstanding of what God expects, but there is the narrow door. Today, that narrow door is open, and every time you enter through the doors of our church, this is the door to which you're pointed [point to cross]—to this door [point to font] that puts God's name on you and points you to the Narrow Door, through this door [point to Bible] that shows you the One who used the wood of the cross to make your door to heaven, and here [point to the altar], where with bread and wine, body and blood, you are refocused on the one and only Way—Christ, the Narrow Door.

May God bless you as you fight all the distractions and enter through him. Then, when you go out of these doors today, let your love speak precisely of the only Way and Truth and Life. Then come back next week as we see our love speak confidently because Christ's love is our calling. Amen.