

Luke 13:22-30
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
August 24, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last week, you heard that Jesus came to earth to bring not peace, but division... that, the baptism of fire and judgment He willingly underwent upon the cross, He baptized you into and gives you new and sustained purifying of life through the work of the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacraments. You also heard that such things do not bring peace upon this sin-loving world, but it brings division within – perhaps within families, even within yourself.

But, what *is* this division? Perhaps not a lot of time was spent on that last week because it's not until the subsequent verses that Christ's definition of and intention behind that word *division* is brought to light. Yes, division between family members... even (as Pr. Nelson pointed out) within yourself... but what kind of *division*? Emotional? Psychological? Interpersonal conflict? What are we talking about? What does this division *look* like?

This begins to unfold a bit more in the verses between last week's text and today's text. In the verses between, Jesus first says, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, 'A shower

is coming.’ ... You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?” (“*What* present time?” you might ask. Hold that thought.)

Next in those verses, Jesus exhorts, “Why do you not [settle matters between yourselves?], lest your accuser drag you to the judge... and you be put in prison?” In other words, “Why are you so self-certain of your righteousness, that you are surprised when the judge sides with your accuser?”

Then, Jesus comments on Galileans who died at the hand of Pilate and those in Siloam who were killed by a falling tower, and he says, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Do you see where this is heading? This is all a commentary on repentance... *there’s* the division. The division is not one of emotions or societal discord or even psychological dissatisfaction with yourself. The division that Jesus came to bring manifests itself in the call to repentance – it’s division from your sins! Those who repent do so because they trust that Jesus’ fiery, bloody baptism on the cross divides them from their sins and saves them. Those who do not repent (perhaps, back to last week’s reading, half the members of a household) refuse to because they either distrust Jesus’ promises through the cross or they just don’t believe they need them.

So, when we get to our text, and Jesus is stopped along the way by someone who says, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?”

he responds to that theoretical pontification by awakening his hearers from their self-certain slumber. Stop and consider the importance of that for a moment:

Only one who is self-assured in his own status will pontificate generically about faceless, lifeless numbers (few v. many). The one who knows the danger to himself, why would he spend any time in idle pontification?

So, when Jesus responds to the man, he responds “to them” (the text says), meaning every hearer, and we ought certainly include ourselves in that, and what word does he consistently use throughout his response: He never says “those, those out there, the generic ones.” He says, “**You**... I tell *you*... *you* begin to stand outside... he will answer *you*, ‘I do not know where *you* come from’ ...*You* will begin to say... [and] There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when *you* see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, but *you*... cast out.”

In short, Jesus tells us, “Stop pontificating about the divisions of eternal life and eternal perishing, as if it’s mere hypothetical dogma to be debated, with no personal impact on you. The divisions of eternal life and eternal perishing concern *you*. Christ came not to bring a false peace, false sense of security to the world, saying to the impenitent “All is well.” He came to bring division... and His all-meritorious sacrifice is the dividing line between you and your sin. Or, to use our text’s illustration, He and his merit is the narrow door.

All who despise or shrug at that meritorious sacrifice as if “Yeah, I believe it, but don’t really need it” all who seek to enter another way with a different gospel, all who seek to widen that door with a supplemental “Jesus +” theology (Jesus + my works, Jesus + my faith, Jesus + my decisions) will all perish... and all who fear perishing, *you* who are here in these pews this morning because you rightly fear perishing... what has Jesus said to you in these intervening verses?

- “Interpret the present time!”
 - Just as Paul says to the Corinthians, “Now is the day of salvation; we put no stumbling block in front of you. Repent while there’s still time!”
- “Settle with your accuser, repent to him, before the matter gets to the divine judge!”
- “Unless you repent, you will likewise perish.”

Notice, the call to repentance is the call to safety. The danger is true daily-life sin, not mere ‘imperfect pontificating.’ The call to repentance is the call to safety precisely because it’s the call to despair of your *self*, your supposed righteousness, and to hide in Christ’s righteousness... to live out that hiding in Christ by repenting to your fellow Christian (because the sin that would cause you to perish is often carried out and borne by your neighbor)... and that Christian neighbor can confess Christ’s forgiveness to you and share in joy that your sin will not cause you to perish, but that you are safe in Him who is the narrow door.

Go back to last week's epistle reading from Hebrews. Listen to the words again and notice how much the writer speaks of the faithful's constant awareness of the danger of sin, the *true* (not theoretical) danger of sin [Remember, these are verses that come immediately before today's epistle reading in which God talks about disciplining sons whom He *loves*.] The true danger of sin... sin in you, burdens caused by the sin of others, sin that wearies and disheartens you to grow cold toward all those promises wrapped up in the call to repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The epistle says it this way:

"Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses (including Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the multitude from north, south, east, west, and all the prophets), **let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...** [And, in a race, many run, but *few* receive the prize, Paul says... in other words, a narrow win... and how is that win ours?] **looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross** [the baptism of fire with which he was baptized, that it would forever divide the world between salvation *in Him* and condemnation *apart from Him*].

And then, how does the epistler conclude:

"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility [those smugly indifferent to their Messiah, refusing to repent with dependence upon Him]... **(Consider him) so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted."**

In other words, yes, you will wrestle against others' sin just as ever-presently as against your own. Do not grow weary, for Christ endured the hostility of *your* sin and instead of condemning you, lovingly called you to repentance, called you to safety!, that – freed from love of Self – you may be safe in His forgiveness and rejoice in His grace.

Echoing that, in our daily battle against sin, do we endure other sinners with stubborn hostility (as if righteous ourselves) and thereby faith grows weary and fainthearted? Or do we, for our sake and for theirs, do we flee to and trust and rejoice in Jesus' call to exhale repentance and inhale forgiveness and live that life of repentance and forgiveness that is nurtured and sustained by Christ's Word and Sacraments?

In theological pontificating, we're very willing to love the theory of repentance and forgiveness. But in the daily-life struggle, do we not often show the subconscious smugness of our self-certainty? We say regarding our fellow sinner: "Well, I'll repent when he repents." 'Do you not know how to interpret the present time?' Jesus asks. Your sin is going to destroy you, to cause you to perish, and you want to use repentance as a bargaining chip? Such bargaining can only be done by one who at least subconsciously doesn't take seriously Jesus' warning: "Unless you repent, you too will perish."

Yes, Jesus even says (incredible!) that the one who is self-secure in his righteousness will still go through all the motions. He'll come to the Lord's Table; he'll sit at the Lord's feet. But he'll do so with a heart that wants to *prove* to the Lord his superior righteousness compared to those 'worse sinners *actually* in danger of perishing... the *many* who are not part of the *few* of us who know we are saved.' And with that ace up his sleeve, he will confidently say to the Lord on the day of Judgment, "I ate and drank in your presence, you taught within my earshot. (I didn't take any of it to heart, but I was *there*... party-crashing the gathering of the faithful.)" And Jesus will see right through the impenitent and say, "I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me."

And when the truth of eternal condemnation hits the impenitent between the eyes, Jesus says, "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." As the day of salvation has passed, as Paul says to the Corinthians, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth in deep regret that you didn't heed for yourself but merely pontificated about, the Lord's call to repentance.

In truth, that call to repentance you hated so much was a sweet, sweet thing... for in the same breath was the great promise of the Christ and the unlocking of the narrow door. How does Jesus say it to his apostles, but that "the preaching of repentance **for the forgiveness of sins** go out to all nations," that all nations might be saved by the blood of the cross, and multitudes from east and west,

north and south be ushered by God's grace into the kingdom of God, to recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all the prophets, the cloud of witnesses who lived by faith (meaning, only seeing from a distance their vindication)... who lived by faith that the founder and perfecter of their faith would **free** them from their sin which clung so closely, would **defend** them as they endured from sinners hostility, and would **perfect** their faith... just as He once perfected the Faith by accomplishing the atoning sacrifice and sealing the promises of God... so now he would perfect *them*; He will perfect *you* by safely bringing you, through himself (the narrow door), into the kingdom of God... the inheritance forever safely divided from all who perish apart from Christ. ||

Now, there *is* an inherent weakness in how we sinners can hear this. For we often hear this and interpret that we are saved *by* our repentance. And then we worry whether we have “repented *enough*” ... enough for what? To prove to God your righteousness? We can never repent “enough” to earn God's favor... and even among fellow Christians, the one who waits until his sinning brother repents “enough” will never be willing to forgive. Jesus never says, “Unless you repent *enough*, you too will perish.” But you *are* to repent from the heart.

You are not saved *by* repentance. You are saved by Christ, who – in calling you to repentance – lovingly divides you from your Old stubborn Adam; lovingly uses His holy Word as a scalpel – a

sharp instrument to be sure, but an instrument of healing and medicine – that He may divide from you the cancer and rot of sin that threatens your health.

Or, to use another Biblical analogy, he uses his rod and staff as a shepherd to sometimes *firmly*, other times *gently* – but **always lovingly** – safeguard you as his dear sheep. In our sermon hymn, wasn't that the interesting inclusion (almost seemed out of place) – that verse 1 was about the multitude as described in our Gospel Reading – and verses 3 and 4 were about the certain salvation that awaits those who He safely brings to the banqueting table. But what was verse 2? – it was a picture of our daily life as the sheep of the Shepherd. Not just a theological pontification, but a picture of how that great theological truth of Jesus' love plays out even amongst under-shepherd and people in the local congregation:

“O God, let us hear when our Shepherd shall call” [that capital-S Shepherd being Christ, but through the daily life of Word and Sacraments stewarded by under-shepherds] ... ***“in accents persuasive and tender.”*** Persuasive and tender: is the call to repentance a beating/bludgeoning over the head? Or is it the tender but unwavering exhortation to hear His Word, that it may prick your heart?... and why such accents ‘persuasive and tender’? – **“That while there is time”** [Interpret the time! Jesus says] **we make haste, one and all, and find *Him*, our mighty defender.”**

Friends, look to Jesus – the founder, the perfector, the defender or
Your faith – for His promise of the eternal banquet for the blessed is
true, and its for *you*, that all Christians may confidently sing:

The heavens shall ring with an anthem more grand
than ever on earth was recorded.
The blest of the Lord shall receive at His hand
the crown to the victors awarded.

With certain eagerness for that, we joyfully live the life of
repentance and forgiveness and therefore conclude the hymn: “Have
mercy upon us, O Jesus.”

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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