Text: Luke 13:22-30

**Introduction**

First off, thank you for a couple of weeks off. It’s been 15 years since I’ve had that and it was much appreciated. Also thank you for the moving.

A cynic might say, Mark, your stuff is still in storage in NY, this sermon better be good (Pause)

although I don’t think Billy Graham or John Chrysostom could preach one that good. And you got a Mark Brown.

But of course most of your don’t exactly know what a Mark Brown is just yet. That makes preaching a little interesting. Luther wouldn’t approve quoting the Philosopher, but Aristotle said that any public rhetoric has three arguments: pathos – an emotional or gut argument, logos – a head argument, and ethos – an argument from the person or spirit speaking, to him that would have been the heart. We will get to know each other and hopefully that ethos portion will grow. Until then, I’m borrowing some of it from the church at large who for some unknown reason ordained me and from your leadership and your good will who extended me a call. I’d ask that you continue to extend that good will, and your prayers to me as this ministry starts.

**Trouble in the World**

Putting aside the joking and the icebreaking, when I looked at the texts for today, I saw a couple of themes. There is a theme that is personally near and dear to me, and that is the doctrine of election. And the mystery of that doctrine flows right into a reality of the church…She comes out of everywhere.

There are multiple ways get started on the doctrine of election. Mine happened to be attending a Presbyterian College and getting introduced to John Calvin which kicked off roughly 20 years of spiritual struggle. But the question that someone asked Jesus as he was traveling to Jerusalem teaching is the more common. “Lord, will those who are saved be few?”

For the people that Jesus was preaching to, I think the answer that many wanted to hear would have been a simple yes. Acceptable answers would have been: “Yes, the Jewish people, God will give his kingdom to the remnant of Israel.” That would have been the universal answer. The more narrow answer would have been something like, “Yes, those Jews who keep the law.” And keeping the law defined as the Apostle Paul once said, “as to the law, a Pharisee…as to righteousness under the law, blameless (Phil 3:5).”

If you find someone asking that question today, the hoped for answer I think is exactly the opposite. People talk about it as the problem of pluralism. If you are growing up with a multitude of religious doctrines around you, including within your own family, eventually you ask the question – “what about this person?” And the hoped for answer is basically: “god accepts everyone, except Hitler, Hitler and maybe Jeffrey Dahmer don’t qualify.” Some of that comes from the pathos, the true emotion, of caring about specific people. But there are sneaky other reasons that we don’t really want to admit.

First, if Jesus would just answer “No, almost everyone will be saved” we are excused from our burden of witnessing to Christ. Our Christianity can become exactly that our personal quirky belief not “the only name under heaven by which men can be saved.” And if faith just becomes our personal quirky belief, then others can have theirs. And at the bottom of that long hill you find the refrain from the book of Judges – “everyone does what is right in their own eyes.”

I think that is where we are at today. Instead of the law of God being good and wise, even though we can’t keep it, it is still good for us. Instead of that, if Jesus would just say “Nah, everyone is fine, my Father is a big softie”, we can ignore the calling of Jesus to righteousness.

**Gospel in the Text**

But that is not what Jesus says. Jesus doesn’t satisfy either those like the Jews he is talking to who are convinced of their place in the Kingdom, nor does he satisfy the modern who is looking to dodge the harder calls of the life of faith.

The good news in the text is two-fold. You can mark this down, because this is the only time that Pastor Brown will give you permission to be completely narcissistic. That other person’s salvation is not really on you. If you are asking what about that person, stop. Peter tried that about John after the resurrection, and Jesus tells Peter that is none of his business. Here, “will few be saved?” “You, you strive to enter through the narrow door.” That persons ultimate fate or salvation is wrapped up in the mystery of God’s election from the beginning of time. And what is the clay to say to the potter?

What you are called to do is be witnesses to Christ. And how we do that is by how we live regardless of the choices of others. Jesus would preach, “let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matt 5:16).” The apostle Peter would echo him, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Pet. 2:12 ESV)” You are not responsible for anyone’s fate but your own. The world may and probably will speak against you as evildoers, but on the Day of the Lord, on the day of Christ’s visitation, the world’s testimony changes. The one who strives is the witness to the glory of God.

Because today is the day of grace for all who hear it. The Master of the house has opened the door today. That is His sovereign choice. Jesus said in John that he himself is the door. And he remains the door today. There is only one way into the house and it is the way the Master of the House built it. And that way is faith in Jesus Christ. We can make a shipwreck of our faith, likewise with the Spirit we can grow in that faith. We do not have the power to force others to faith. We can only live our lives according to the Word. We can only witness to the hope that lives within us. “We continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven (Col. 1:23 ESV)”

**Gospel in the World**

The amazing thing about that proclaimed word is the return. It only comes to sinners. It isn’t just one tribe. If your hope is in being part of the tribe – whether that is Jews or Greeks or any specific group – hearing the proclamation of Jesus isn’t a genetic marker. The people of God will come from east and west, from north and south, and recline at the table. The door of the grace of Christ is open to all today. This is the will of the Father that all would hear. This is the gospel that has been proclaimed in all creation. Today, Christ receives sinners.

It is not tribal, but neither is it everyone who values their own works. There are many who would say “Lord, Lord, we ate in your presence, and you taught in our streets.” But they did not hear the word. It was their presence, their streets, not the Lord’s. They thought they and everyone on their streets would be just ok. That the door would always be open to everyone. But when the master of the house has risen, that day of grace is over. The day of judgement has come.

It is the least, the last, the sinners. It is the poor in spirit, those who mourn. It is those who sought a better country that will sit with Abraham. Those who strove to enter through the narrow door of Christ alone. God’s sovereign choice is this oddball group. Those who know if it is left to us we are lost.

But The Father has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world. And it is in his might that I trust. Amen.