Text: Luke 13:22-30

**Introduction**

I was joking with a fellow pastor the other day about some of these gospel reading from Luke in the middle of this long green season. “Depart from me, all you workers of evil!” This is the gospel of the Lord. Or “the way is narrow”…and looking around we might not make it through.

I normally think that the church year and real life mesh up a lot more than they have any right to. But this is one of the breaks. I know school has started, but it’s still summer time. Technically it will be summer until September 21, even if Labor Day is the traditional end. And in Summer Time the livin’ in supposed to be easy. Baseball games, pools, drinks with plenty of ice, vacations, and even when not on vacation, because others are, things just move slower. But that is not what the middle of this long green season gives us to meditate on. Advent to Easter is easily carried along on the life of Jesus. Epiphany to Pentecost is about growing spiritual awareness and preparation. But then we have to start walking this Christian life ourselves.

And yes, that isn’t true. Christ is always with us. He has given us the Spirit. But that is more a statement that we are asked to grow into spiritual maturity. And that calls for things like endurance or perseverance. It calls for developing the virtue of hope.

**Text**

As so at the start of our gospel lesson we get a journey reminder. Back in Luke 9:51 after the Transfiguration – the high point of the easy days in Luke, the end of the Galilean ministry – Jesus sets his face to go to Jerusalem. He sets his feet toward the cross. And we occasionally get the reminders. “Jesus went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem.” Each step a step closer to the cross. Each step also a step close to the resurrection and ascension and the victory. But the only way out is through. And when the hill is Calvary, it can certainly block out things past it. And paraphrasing Luther – it is the poor theologian who stares past the cross. Because it is that cross that is the narrow door.

And someone comes up to Jesus in one of these towns and asks a perennial question. “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” Anybody who has ever set out on this journey has had this question. And there are lots of things that can set it off. But I think you can make a two by two grid of the thought behind. You might be honestly asking about others, or you might be asking about yourself. And the other side you might be optimistic about the answer or pessimistic.

God bless you if you are asking about others and are optimistic. Sweet summer children. Or maybe not so cynical, I wish I had the depth of your faith. And you have plenty of biblical support. From the promise to Abraham of children as numerous as the stars, to the saints too numerous to count in the picture of Revelation. But this box I don’t believe is what Jesus is addressing. It is the other three.

**Others/Pessimistic**

If you are asking this question truly about others and you are pessimistic. Jesus has a couple of things to say. First, you don’t worry about that. Notice that the very first part of Jesus’ answer is “You strive to enter through the narrow door.” Jesus does not deny that it might appear like few. The way is narrow. But he completely redirects the man’s question away from others and toward himself. Are you walking the narrow way. We ultimately do not control others, and while we would say our salvation is not by ourselves, how we walk with the Spirit in that life of Sanctification does involve us. The second thing that Jesus would remind the pessimistic about other is of the promise stretching from Abraham to the ends of the earth. You will see Abraham and the prophets…and people from east and west, and from north and south, reclining at the table in the Kingdom. The way might be narrow, because the way is Christ alone. And the Way is through the cross alone. But the mercy of love of God is deep and wide.

**Self/Optimistic**

That leaves the other side of our 2x2. And the first one I want to think about is if you are asking this question about yourself and are optimistic. Lord, I look pretty good compared to the rest of these losers or sinners. You want to confirm that for me?

If you think you are doing that well, check your walk. At least that is what I take as Jesus’ story. “For many I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” They will stand outside saying “Lord, open to us…we ate and drink in your presence, you taught in our streets.” We felt pretty darn good about how we were living.

And the truth appears to be a little too comfortable. “I tell you, I do not know where you come from.”

Our age is quite confident that God is a good guy, a big softie. It leans toward universalism. God is just going to save everyone. But I heard a sharp observation this week that such universalism is just the inverse of the unpopular Calvinist double predestination. Both end up not caring how we walk. Yes, both would complain about me saying that. But the Calvinist would confirm that someone could trod as righteously as Enoch and if God hadn’t chosen them, too bad. And the universalist will confirm that even Hitler has to be there.

Jesus is way too sharp in his words for our age’s simple optimism. How you walk matters. And the rightness or wrongness of that walk is not determined by the Spirit of the Age, but by the Spirit. Otherwise some who are last wouldn’t be first, and some who are first wouldn’t be last. Lean not upon your own understanding…in all your ways submit to Him, and he will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6).

**Self/Pessimistic**

That leaves the last square. If others/optimistic is the sweet summer child of faith, self/pessimistic is Wednesday’s child, full of woe. Lord, it looks like few are being saved, and I doubt I am one of them? Do I have that right?

And in many ways Wednesday’s Child is who Lutheranism was made to preach to. There are lots of reason we might find ourselves in that position. Maybe we’ve made it to step 4 and made a searching and fearless moral inventory. Maybe something us has held a mirror before our acts. Maybe we’ve been on this walk and we are just tired. Our hands are drooping and our knees are week. The law has beat us and left us half dead on the side of the road.

But I want to use the special metaphor that runs through our lessons today. Maybe you just feel far off. Sitting with pig in a far country. Not the center of anything. Always last in line.

“For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all the nations…from Tarshish and Pul and Lud…Tubal and Javan, and the coastlands far off.” Jonah choses Tarshish to said to because it was the furthest point on the map. That is basically what all those place Isaiah lists are. The rim of the known map. Out where “here be monsters” would be places. And if you are feeling you are monster at the edge of the map. Today is the day that Christ brings you close. Today is the day that the door is open. Today Christ bids you to take you seat with him and Abraham, and Isaaca and Jacob, and all the sinners of the world – from east and west and north and south. Come to the table and receive the LORD.

Today you are not outside, but have been called inside by the grace of Christ through that cross.

Life up your heads. And live in hope. The steadfast love of the Lord is upon you. And he has called you close to him.