**Sermon for Proper 16-C**

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Aiken, South Carolina**

08-24-25

Luke 13:22–30

You know, the best humor always draws its observations from an element of truth. One of my favorite one-liners is; “The fact that there’s a highway to hell, and only a stairway to Heaven, says a lot about anticipated traffic numbers.”

As he journeyed toward Jerusalem, someone asked Jesus *“Lord, will those who are saved be few?”* Jesus confirmed that, yes, only a few will be saved. Jesus was not one to sugar coat the hard facts. But, neither did he simply say “yes,” and leave it at that.

He admonished everyone who would listen *24“Strive to enter through the narrow door****.*** *For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door…*

Jesus here is speaking of the Last Day; Judgment Day; the day of His return to judge the living and the dead, when all who have died will be raised from the dead, some to eternal life in paradise with Jesus; but many to eternal death in the torments of hell.

We hear the desperate cries of the damned, frantically knocking on the door, pleading Lord! Open to us! Imagine what it must have been like outside of Noah’s ark when the flood came. So it shall be outside the gates of heaven at the moment of Christ’s return.

It is a narrow door through which we enter into eternal life. Jesus Christ crucified is that door. The eyes of faith hold as most precious that which the world finds foolish, unimpressive, and uncomfortable.

The simple, straight forward good news that Jesus, the humble man from Nazareth, is the Lord; that he has come and taken away all of your sin by taking it upon himself and killing it upon the cross in his own body; that for his sake, God the Father has forgiven you and has declared you innocent; this is not from any god of man’s imagination.

We want gods whom we can impress with our own sacrificial acts. We want rules to obey in order to show others how holy we are. We want the inside, exclusive knowledge of secret wisdom that makes us members of God’s exclusive club.

We want holiness on our terms; not rescue by God who tells us that the imaginations of our hearts are only evil continually, and that we are helpless to save ourselves.

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, as he journeyed to Jerusalem and the cross, he taught openly; publicly, and many heard his teaching, but very few listened; very few believed.

Yet, in the day of judgment, they’ll declare how they were there, in the crowd, when he was in the public squares proclaiming the advent of the kingdom of God, and how they even ate and drank with him.

Perhaps they were among those who feasted on the endless supply of bread and fish that Jesus miraculously provided on a couple of occasions.

They were there. But the fact is, they were never his disciples. His teaching was nothing to them, and neither was he. They disregarded Jesus and his word, and now in the day of his return, it is too late.

How many who have lived and died since then will offer similar justifications of themselves in that day? “Lord, you know me; I was a lifetime member of the largest church in town” “I was in church almost every Christmas, and sometimes, even Easter.” “ I gave exactly ten percent of my income; right to the penny” “I did everything I had to do”

They’ll present their resume’, but once again, the fact is, they were never his disciples. His teaching was nothing to them, and neither was he. They disregarded Jesus and his word, and now in the day of his return, it is too late.

Jesus said; *And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”*

Name dropping doesn’t work with Jesus. Whoever does not acknowledge him in this life, he will not acknowledge in eternity.

Jesus didn’t “network” with the beautiful people. He didn’t rub elbows with the leaders and influencers of his day. In fact, more often than not, he bumped heads with them. Among the elite, Jesus was not a popular guy.

One of their earliest critiques of Jesus was that he received sinners and ate with them. They thought it absolutely scandalous.

They ought to have been thankful; elated, that Jesus had such close fellowship with sinners. I know that I am, because I know that he still does. Thanks be to God!

The gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ alone has been proclaimed, and continues to be proclaimed, the world over. It’s hardly a secret.

Because of this, as Jesus says; *29And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.*

Jesus Christ has not redeemed only some people; Jesus Christ has redeemed everybody. God excludes nobody from salvation and paradise.

The one who rejects Christ has excluded himself. Like the old song says; “If I die and my soul be lost, it’s nobody’s fault but mine.”

We have God’s word, by which the Lord Himself creates within us faith in His promises. One day, you and I, and many other sinners just like us, shall recline at table with Jesus, for we have heard his word, and we repent of our sins, and we believe.

This is the one, and the only difference, between the few who will be saved, and the many who will be lost; hearing and believing the sure and certain word of the Lord. Wide and pleasant is the way that leads to hell, and narrow is the way that leads to eternal life.

Therefore, we pray that all who hear the word of God, the clear, eternal truth regarding sin and salvation, not resist the Holy Spirit, but instead, repent and believe. Amen.