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Pentecost 11

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A Door Only ONE Can Fit Through”

Text: Luke 13:22-30

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

Lord, will those who are saved be few?

This was one of those questions the rabbis in Jesus' day liked to argue about. They had many such questions that occupied their time - this was just one of them. And they liked to ask Jesus. Get His opinion. Get Him on their side of the argument. But as you know, Jesus didn't play that game. He always disarmed them. He would turn the question around. He would give them an answer they didn't expect and leave them perplexed. His was a new way of thinking for them; a new way of looking at the Scriptures.

Jesus does that here. He doesn't answer the question, but changes it from **few** to **you**: the question is not whether *few* will be saved, but will you be saved?

There were times, though, when it was a few. In the days of Noah, it was eight. In Elijah's day, there were 7,000 who did not bend the knee to Baal. That's a bit better, but not great, considering that Israel was some 600,000 strong when they came out of Egypt. How about in our day and age? Old timers will remember when churches were often full and catechism classes large. Great cathedrals in Europe once filled with people now have but a handful each Sunday. Here in America there are some so-called megachurches, but these seem to rise and fall, wax and wane with the charisma of their leader. For the past few decades the LCMS has been shrinking, as have most denominations. People declare themselves "spiritual but not religious" and cut themselves off from the church - what about them? Are *they* in or out?

If you were a Jew in Jesus' day, you might answer this question by tracing your ancestry back to Abraham. And as a child of Abraham, you were a child of the promise given to Him. And as a child of the promise, of course you were in! You were one of God's chosen people! But others in Jesus' day might counter that argument by pointing to Moses and his day, when the people often rebelled against God. There was the incident with the Golden Calf, the constant grumbling and complaining, the false gods that kept popping up like

weeds. So just being a child of Abraham wasn't enough, they would say. You've got to keep the Law of Moses - and those who did *that* were few. *So what say you, Jesus? Many or few? Abraham or Moses? Where do you come down?*

And we haven't even mentioned the Samaritans, or the Gentiles, those not descended from Abraham, the uncircumcised. Of course, the Jews thought, *they're not* going to be saved! Right?

Well here's the thing: the promise given to Abraham . . . *was of Jesus*. All the Law of Moses was so that the people would put their faith *in Jesus*. Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham. He was the Seed, the descendant of Abraham through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. And Jesus was the one all the priests and sacrifices of the Mosaic Law pointed to. He was the fulfillment of them all. They were the shadows, the indications of the one who was coming. Jesus was the real deal.

So what the Jews were arguing about was standing right among them and in front of them! Should they have known that? Should they have known that from the Old Testament? Well, let's see . . .

Born of a virgin. Check.

He will be called a Nazarene. Check.

He will open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. Check.

He will proclaim good news to the poor. Check.

The Jews, they knew there was something about Jesus. That's why they kept asking Him questions and wanting Him to weigh in on questions like the one today. But to put their faith in Him? That was a big ask.

As it is for many today. Many today who would concede there's something about Jesus . . . that's He's a prophet, or a good man, or a role model, or even a Messiah of some sort. But to put their faith in Him? *Well . . . Follow the truth of His Word? Eh* . . .

And it's not just *others* . . . don't we do this, too? How often do you put your faith in yourself and your abilities? This is one of my favorites: I know I shouldn't do this, BUT . . . and then I do it anyway! And how often do we rail against a sin only to engage in it ourselves? They're so full of themselves *we so proudly say!* And how many preachers have fallen from their positions because they were caught in the sins they were preaching against? And don't think the guy standing here, your pastor, is any different! I'm just as bad a sinner - maybe worse - than the rest of you. This alb, this stole, doesn't make me holier than thou.

So Jesus' answer really is pretty on target, isn't it? It's not a question of many or few, but a question of you. The Jews in Jesus' day could say to Him that **they ate and drank with Him and listened to His teaching**. But according to Jesus, that's not enough. Just as it's not enough to be descended from Abraham or keep the Law of Moses. That door they're trying to measure and get the dimensions of and see how many can fit through it - guess what? It's too narrow for them. And it's too narrow for you. There's only one who can fit through that door. And notice: I didn't say one at a time! I said *just one*. Jesus. The only way through that door is **in Him**.

That's bad news for your pride; good news for your despair.

Bad news if you want to do it yourself; good news when you know you can't.

Bad news if you want to think yourself good; good news if you know you aren't and repent.

So those Samaritans, those Gentiles, those uncircumcised, those the Jews thought **last** and no way *they're* going to get through, be saved . . . And those Jews who could trace their decent from Abraham and those who thought they kept all the Law and so of course would get through, be **first**, in fact, to be saved . . . *Hmmm*. They just might be surprised . . . And who might surprise us today? *Who's first? Who's last? Many or few?*

But Jesus would have us think differently.

So instead of that kind of thinking, at the beginning of every service we say: *I am a poor, miserable sinner*. We consider our unworthiness. And you say that whether you think you did good this week or not, because it's true whether you know it or not. We don't worry about first or last, many or few - we fix our eyes on Jesus, and **He puts us in Himself**. I forgive you not many, not few, but **ALL** your sins.

And did you ever notice that in baptism, we baptize children like they are adults and adults like they are children? And we don't use more water for really bad sinners and less for those who aren't so bad. Same words, same water, same baptism, because what matters is not you, but what Jesus is doing there - **putting you in Himself**.

And at the Table here, for the Supper, we stand side-by-side - no matter who you are, where you're from, what you've done, if you had a good week or a bad week, are happy or sad - and all receive the same Body and Blood of Jesus. Jesus **putting you in Himself** as He puts himself in you.

And thus in Jesus, where He goes, you go. He died on the cross and you die with Him there. He rose from the dead and you will rise with Him. He ascended into heaven and you will ascend with Him. And as Jesus died for every sin of every person who ever lived, that door is open for all, *even you*. And Jesus is willing and able and wants to take every person

through it with Himself. He is the **only one** who can get through, but **all** can get through in **Him**. First, last, big, little, Jew, Gentile, Samaritan, whoever. **People will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God**. And in Jesus, you will, too.

And if you're worried about whether you are in Jesus or not, if you're going to get through that door or not, don't look at yourself, how well you're doing, or your sincerity, or anything in you - 'cause you'll never find certainty there! That mirror only shows you failure, hypocrisy, and shortcomings, and so despair. Instead, fix your eyes on Jesus, on the cross **for you**. Fix your ears on Jesus, His words **for you**. For what He did for you and says to you is truth and certainty. Cling to that, to **Him**. And then don't despair, but rejoice! In Him who has such mercy and love and forgiveness for sinners like you and me. His mercy, love, and forgiveness that puts you in Himself, and takes you through the narrow door with Himself.

And when you leave this place . . . remember that I said just a moment ago that **where Jesus goes, you go?** That's not just true of heaven and eternal life, but also of earth and our life here and now. Jesus came and lived with sinners, and so do you. Sinners where you work, in your school, in your neighborhoods - sinners everywhere! - even in your homes! And that mercy and love and forgiveness for sinners Jesus has for you and me? We get to show that, too, to the sinners we live with. Not because they deserve it, because they don't. Just as we don't. That's what makes it a gift. From Jesus to you and from you to others. And just maybe some will want to know what got into you! And you can tell them. Not what, but **who**.

So *many or few?* We'll leave that up to Jesus. That's above our pay grade! He knows better than we and always does better than we do. Instead, we'll repent and find our life in Him. That is what **striving to enter through the narrow door** is. And it is a striving! Striving against ourselves, striving against our sin and sinful urges, striving against our *I know better* thinking, and instead, repent of ourselves, die to ourselves, and rise and find our life in Jesus. It's not easy. But then, when that last day comes, whether for you personally or for the world, every eye will open and see Jesus. And those in Him now will be in Him **with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God** forever. That's why He came. That's what He came to do. And that's His promise and pledge - not to many or few - but **to you**.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.