

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
September 8, 2013**

**Luke 13:22-30**

**Love Speaks Precisely**

- 1. The Confusion is Great**
- 2. The Gate is Narrow**
- 3. The Stakes are High!**

**Hymns: 356 – 525 – 570**

**Closing: 745**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

*Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. <sup>23</sup> Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”*

*He said to them, <sup>24</sup> “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. <sup>25</sup> Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’*

*“But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’*

*<sup>26</sup> “Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’*

*<sup>27</sup> “But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’*

*<sup>28</sup> “There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. <sup>29</sup> People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup> Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”* Luke 13:22-30

- They said it was time to hit the road, so she went outside, picked up a stick and started “hitting the road.”
- The lady she was working for told her to make some chocolate chip cookies, so she got the chocolate bar and potato chips and went to work on “chocolate, chip cookies.”
- She needed some help “pitching the tent” because it was too heavy for her to lift and throw all by herself.
- And she didn’t get very far “rowing the boat” because it was so hard for her to drag them on shore to make a straight “row.”

Do you know who I’m talking about? That woman who so badly wanted to do what was right, and who always ended up being so wrong, is Amelia Bedelia. She is the character in a series of old children’s books, made lovable by her very literal way of carrying out directions. In every way, she wanted to do what was right and she was always sure that she had—but in reality, she just didn’t get it.

For a children’s book character, that’s okay. It’s funny and cute when the message gets misunderstood. We can laugh at the humorous results. But what about when it happens in real life; when somebody thinks they are doing it right, but end up being completely wrong? What happens when a message is communicated, but not done so with clarity or precision? Embarrassment can ensue. Accidents can take place. Good intentions can end in trouble. Now, what about when it happens spiritually?

The gospel lesson today drives home the scary seriousness of that situation. As we look back to Jesus’ day, we see many people who wanted to do right. Perhaps the best example of that is of the people known as the Pharisees. They were members of the Jewish religion who were very zealous for the Law of God and who were very focused on their spiritual welfare. Every-thing that they did in life was done with regard to their standing before God. Their intentions were good, their relationship with God was at the heart of all that they did. It is why so many people in the land of Israel respected and looked up to the Pharisees. These were men who were pleasing God. These were men who were doing it right. These were men who would be in heaven. So the people thought.

Jesus saw it differently. The truth was that the Pharisee’s religious life would end up being

completely wrong. That is why Jesus spent his time with those Pharisees calling them “white-washed walls,” and “broods of vipers,” and most directly, “hypocrites.” He quoted Isaiah saying, “These people worship with their lips, but their hearts are far from (God),” when speaking about them to the crowds of Israel. Jesus didn’t mince words when he spoke about the Pharisees. His words were precise and they were clear. And that led to great confusion amongst the people of Israel. If these Pharisees weren’t doing it right, then who was? If these Pharisees weren’t pleasing to God, then who could be? If these Pharisees weren’t headed to heaven, then who was? That great confusion is what prompted the question we see in verse 23 where someone asked Jesus, **“Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”**

That question was prompted by fear. It was asked searching for assurance. The someone that asked that question wanted Jesus to say, “Of course not, many are going to be saved.” But that is not what Jesus said, is it?

Instead, Jesus said, **“Many will try to enter and will not be able to...You will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ ‘But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’”**<sup>26</sup> **“Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’”**<sup>27</sup> **“But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’”**<sup>28</sup> **“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.”**

Not exactly a comforting response, was it? I can’t imagine that reply filled many of the people there with confidence about their standing before God.

So why would Jesus say it? When it came to their spiritual path, there was no room for glossed words and people-pleasing. Jesus spoke precisely about these people’s prospects for salvation because they needed to know that they were doing it wrong, in spite of how right they might have thought they were. The path to heaven was not found in obedience to the Law. It was not found in dedication to the many, many Jewish religious practices. It was not found in following the way of the Pharisees. Jesus’ motivation for speaking these blunt words was that he was simply not okay with all of these people thinking they were doing it the right way! As God Almighty, the Savior of the world, he loved these people, even the Pharisees, way too much to just let them do it their own way

without telling them the truth: They were flat out wrong! And being wrong, being confused in spiritual matters has a terrible and eternal result. It leaves a person on the outside, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth!

That has to make us think, doesn’t it? It has to make us think about all the people in this world, or more personally, all the people that we know, who think they are doing it right.

We might think of people who would say that they are good. People who would tell us that they would be fine standing before God and pointing to their “good” life as the reason that God should give them approval.

We might think of people who would tell us that they are “spiritual but not religious” meaning that they have inner spirituality and don’t need to really spend time in God’s Word or worship because it’s all about a feeling they have.

We might think of the person who ends every conversation about religion by saying, “In the end, we’re all worshipping the same God and headed for the same place.”

Each of those people think they are doing it the right way.

What is your M.O. when you encounter someone who thinks they are doing it right, but you know has it wrong? What do you say when the coworker says that we are all going to the same place anyways? What do you say to the family member who says that the doctrine isn’t important? Do you repeat Jesus’ words, **“Many will try to enter and will not be able to?”** Or do you shrug your shoulders and smile, because you don’t want to offend, you don’t want to argue? Do you balk at what they are saying in your head, but keep your mouth closed? I can think of countless times where I’ve responded awkwardly and moved on, rather than speaking precisely.

Here’s what it comes down to: You, I, we, can’t be OKAY with people being confused. We can’t be okay with people having half the truth; we can’t be okay with those general replies or that misplaced spirituality. We can’t be okay with people thinking they are right if they aren’t. We have to speak. We have to speak out of love. We have to speak precisely.

This has to be our message to anyone who has it wrong, “The only way is through the narrow door.”

See, it’s not good enough for people to be stung by their conscience, and go off to find an answer on their own. It’s not good enough for people to think that being spiritual will get them

“good” with God. It’s not good enough for people simply to be in or around church.

People need to know that each person needs a Savior. That means that love will compel us to tell people about sin. It means that we have to confront people about their specific sins. It means that we have to tell people what those sins deserve. If people are going to get to heaven, they need to be told precisely why there is a door to heaven at all. It is because sin has locked it down.

There aren’t many doors, there aren’t wide doors, and there aren’t easy doors. There is the narrow door and it is the only door. Many won’t like that; many won’t listen. They will say that we are being exclusive, they will say that we are being unloving, and they will say that we are being judgmental. That is okay, because it means we have spoken.

That is okay, because there will be those who listen and to them, we then get to speak precisely about God’s solution. We get to point them to the Way, that is, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. We get to show them the narrow door standing open in the Means of Grace. We get to have them look through that door and see a Savior who was willing to do the saving work that each one of us so desperately needs.

Delivering that glorious, life-changing, confusion-ending message can only happen when we first speak precisely about the narrow door.

The stakes are high. The road is wide open for confusion about what church is all about or misunderstanding of what God expects and being wrong leaves people outside. But there is the narrow door. When God gives you opportunity, speak precisely about that narrow door. Speak precisely why it is needed. Speak precisely about what waits for people who enter through it. It is the Savior that they need; it is the Savior who gives them access. Amen.