

## THE NARROW GATE

Luke 13:22-30

You are on a highway when suddenly the traffic starts to slow down. It gets to the point when everyone in your lane is coming to a stop, but cars are moving in the other lane. Then your lane stops while cars in the other lane whip by. If you have driven long enough you know that even though it is tempting to go into that fast lane, the smart thing is to stay where you are. Sooner or later you will see a sign telling you that the fast lane is ending and the traffic on it must merge into the slow lane. The people whipping by at first will have to stop and wait to get into the slow lane farther ahead. In fact they are making matters worse because they tie up traffic as they edge their way into the slow lane.

Jesus speaks about the wide and narrow doors. We may picture in our minds that “wide” and “narrow” refer to the amount of people who go through them. So the conclusion is that many more will not be saved than those who will be. It is kind of like those who will make it through engineering at Iowa State in four years. But what makes the door to hell so “wide” is that it seems like the obvious way. The door to salvation is “narrow” because it is not obvious. It is like the lanes on the highway. But if you are smart, you think ahead and realize it is better to trust in God for eternity than anything else in the here and now.

Yet, that is a lot easier said than done. Going to college involves so many choices, so many forks in the road. Which college do I go to? Which major do you pursue? Which classes should I take? Do I use the Cyclone, Cardinal, Gold, or Cyplex meal plan? What does the IU plan have to do with Dining Dollars and Flex meals? Should I go Greek or not? Should I join this club or that? Do I go out with people in the hall or stay home and study? Should I stay with my roommate for another semester? It is like trying to find your way in Friley Hall. You go along a hallway and the hall comes to a fork. If I go one way it dead ends. The other continues on. Soon you lose any sense of going north, south, east, or west. So often the choices we make lead to dead ends.

That is what the world puts before us. At Iowa State University of Science and Technology (that’s its official name) you will be taught to see things only as true if they can be proven by science. They will use the fancy word “empirical,” which means you can put something in a test tube, run it through a machine, place all kinds of data about it into a computer, and prove what is true or false. But what are you supposed to do about your faith in God? What about your Baptism and going to Holy Communion? What do you do with the Word of God? What do Good Friday and Easter mean to you?

At the university we are also taught that diversity is best. It is wrong to claim that you have the truth and someone else doesn’t. Jesus is good, but so are Buddha, Mohammed, and the Hindu wise men. The idea of a “narrow” door is repulsive.

Don't think that stops after college. What is so emphasized in our world is what works. It didn't take the January 6, 2021 riot or the present inflation for people to distrust the government. That goes back to Vietnam and the questionable way the US got involved there. All institutions, even and especially churches and charities, are ridiculed with scandals. So we are hesitant to trust anyone when they say they have the truth. We'll go with what works. So if the majority of people say it is okay to have sexual relations with someone outside of marriage or to believe whatever you want to about God or to that a human is not a human until it starts to look like one in the womb, then it is easy for us to go along with it. And since our children are so important to us, we will do anything so that they fit in. Soccer or dance practice is more important than spending time talking with them about God. Or we put them in front of a screen so we can get a break, but miss out on the time they could have to see Christ through us.

It is so easy to take the wide door—to do what everyone else is doing. In Iowa perhaps 20% of people regularly go to church. Among college students in this country that percentage is more like 2%. Why are you in church now? Are you bored because classes haven't started yet? Is it just a habit because mom and dad always took you to church on Sunday? Even more, why should you come to church in future weeks?

In the midst of all the confusion we can see who stands at the “narrow” door—Christ Jesus. Do you know what a Manichean is? There were many of them 2,000 years ago. Have you ever met a follower to the god Zeus or Ammon-Re? Many people worshiped them 2,000 years ago. Religions come and go. But the message of Jesus—Christianity--continues. Though it seems to have lost its force in our Western world, Christianity is growing leaps and bounds in Africa and Asia. Christ Jesus continues to change lives all over the world.

We also see Jesus in the wonderful miracle of Easter. Maybe it seems scientifically impossible to bring the dead back to life, but just about all historians agree that something special happened after Jesus died on the cross. How else could a little group of frightened followers grow into the greatest force in human history? Islam grew because of military power. Mohammed had people convert or die by the sword. But Christianity only spread with a message—not with any political, economic, or military power.

And look at what Christianity has done. We take for granted things like hospitals, schools, hospices, and concern for human life. All of those began out of the Christian church. 200 years ago in this country virtually all schools and hospitals were run by churches. The Bible was the main tool used to help people speak and read a common language. The antislavery movement was started by Christians. And Christians continue to make a difference as churches today are working to eradicate malaria in Africa, bring food to the hungry, and speak out against those who deny human rights.

Yet, the door where Jesus stands is still “narrow.” It is not what we look to because it is not about what we do, gain, or accomplish. Every other door is “wide,” because it is about how good, wealthy, smart, powerful, or popular we are. It is what we gain or earn. But the door Jesus opens to us is about what He has done and continues to do for us. It is not about us going

to God, but about Him coming to us in Jesus. Following Jesus through that door may not seem important while we are cramming for tests, getting up too early in the morning, paying off our bills, getting a date, getting up at 3AM to feed a baby, signing a contract, or saving for retirement. Jesus isn't going to tell us which major to pursue, whether or not to go Greek, whom we should marry, how to invest our money, or which doctor's advice we should take. But He alone calls us to eternal life, to a relationship that will never end.