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We Carefully Assess Our Faith in Christ

The Bible clearly teaches that life with God, life here on earth and life forever in heaven, comes through faith in the words and works of Jesus. The words and works of Jesus never change, but faith can falter and fail. In today's Gospel Jesus urges us to carefully analyze and assess the focus of our faith and hope. We make every effort to rely totally on Jesus as we long to be at peace with God.

Sermon Luke 13:22-30

Introduction – When I bought my first car, my mother insisted that I put four things in the trunk of my car: a warm pair of gloves, a warm blanket, a candle, and a book of matches “just in case you break down on a cold night in the winter.” I laughed at her, but I did it, just in case. Never in all my life have I locked myself out of my house, but I have always had a key hidden someplace just in case. We've never had a kitchen fire, but we both know where the fire extinguisher is just in case. I think we're all like that. Even when everything is fine and we're not too concerned about potential problems, we make some decisions just in case. Better safe than sorry.

Most of the people Jesus was talking to in today's Gospel were different from us. They didn't have a long history with Jesus like we do. Some were fairly new followers and some weren't followers at all—interested but not committed. None of them had a clear understanding of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus. Jesus took this opportunity to make it perfectly clear what it meant to be a Christian. He told a story about a house with a narrow door and a homeowner who was ready to close it. His point was this: Do everything that has to be done to follow me in faith or you will spend forever in hell.

All of us here this morning have a long history with Jesus. Many of us learned the simple truths about Jesus from our parents and teachers. We came to understand the teachings of the Bible in catechism classes and Bible classes. We've listened to countless sermons and received Holy Communion more times than we can remember. We understand what it means to be a Christian. So it might seem a little presumptuous or overdone to urge you to do everything that needs to be done to follow Jesus in faith because that's exactly what you've been doing for as long as you can remember.

But that's exactly what Jesus wants to do today. He knows your story; he knows about your faith and commitment. But he still wants to say to us: **Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.** He urges this

Just In Case

Here's what Luke tells us. **Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”** People love to speculate about spiritual things and this man was no exception. Jesus pointed him in a different direction. Better to ask this question: “Will I be saved?” And that's when Jesus told the story about the house with a narrow door and a homeowner who was ready to close it.

The house in this story is life with God. It's a house we live in now and a house we want to keep living in. We are at peace with God. He is our Father and we are his children. He forgives our sins and answers our prayer. At a certain point we will die and then we will have life with God forever.

The door that leads into that house, the way that enables us to have life with God, is Jesus. Jesus lived and died and rose again to save all people from sin. The door is narrow because faith in Jesus is the only way we receive what Jesus did. The Bible teaches us that **God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** We know that truth as well as we know our own name.

The problem comes when people try to get into the life-with-God house with something besides faith in Jesus. Think of it like this. Those who come to Jesus with simple faith and trust in his promises are sleek and slim and enter the narrow door easily. But some people approach the door overweight and bloated with pet sins and personal pleasures and some come overstuffed with self-pride and long lists of their good deeds. With all that extra weight, they don't fit through the narrow door of faith. This is the situation Jesus was describing in this story: **Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 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."** Some of the Jews in Jesus' audience were carrying extra weight of their Jewishness. They were the chosen people of Israel and they had been listening to God all their lives. Jesus told their story: **Then you will say, "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets." But he will reply, "I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!"**

Why would Jesus urge us to make every effort to enter life with God through faith alone when we've been doing exactly that for years? **Well, just in case.** It's so easy to gain weight isn't it; a pound here and five pounds there. We've all learned that at times in our lives. It's the same with faith in Jesus. We gain a pet sin here and a sinful habit there and they feel kind of good and we decide the extra weight won't matter much. We add on the offerings we give and the volunteering we've done and the kindness we've shown and conclude we look pretty good with a few bonus pounds. The church scales show that we're the third or fourth or fifth generation of Lutherans in our family and we figure we must be healthy from God's perspective. And little by little the extra weight squeezes out faith. We take our eyes off of Jesus and put our confidence in ourselves. And all at once we can't fit through the narrow door of faith in Christ alone. And that's why Jesus says to us, too: **Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.** Thank God for the faith God has given you and for the commitment you've shown over the years but strive and strain every day **just in case.** Exercise your faith with repentance, feed your faith with the Word, run your race with Jesus as the finish line. And deep down say again and again: "Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to thy cross I cling."

In his story about the narrow door, Jesus created the worst possible scenario. The owner of the house was ready to shut the door and those who couldn't and wouldn't fit through the door were headed for hell. **There will be weeping there and gnashing of teeth.** But the horror of hell Jesus described wasn't fire and brimstone. The real horror was losing out on what others were enjoying. If they would have approached the door with faith alone, they would have had everything they saw others enjoying. Despite all their Jewishness, **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets** never put their confidence in their history or heritage. They put their faith in the Lord and they gained life with God. Despite their idolatry and their distance from Jerusalem, **people from the east and west and north and south took their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.** They left their idols and their lifestyles and put their faith in Christ. Jesus warned: You considered these people to be the lowest of the worst and considered yourselves the highest of the best. But through faith in Christ those who are last in your opinion have become first in God's sight. And you who thought you were first will be last and will languish with Satan in hell.

Hard words. Especially hard words for people like us who come to church Sunday after Sunday because we believe what the Bible says: We are saved by grace alone, by faith alone, by Scripture alone, and by Christ alone. But Jesus wants us to hear these words **just in case.** We can't know when the Lord will close the door for us. A sudden heart attack, a freak auto accident, a fall down the stairs, even the final judgment. None of us knows when our time of grace will end. And so Jesus says, **Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.** In your thoughts and prayers remember what Jesus has done for you. Assess your attitude toward Jesus every day. Evaluate your need for his love and forgiveness. Measure

how you rely on him for everything. Hold to Jesus by faith alone and you will enjoy all the magnificence of life with God now and then.

In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus raised this truth in a little different way. The point he made was the same. **Enter through the narrow gate**, Jesus said, **for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.** Loving and wise advice even for us. *Just in case. Amen.*