

Sermon for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

'Lord, will those who are saved be few?'

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The Lord delights in not answering questions. Rarely does He actually give an answer to the question that was just asked Him. He never gives the answer you seek. He gives the answer you need. You may question, but *the Lord shall declare.*

'Lord, will those who are saved be few?' It is a simple question, which can be given a simple answer. 'Yes, they will be few.' 'No, they will be many.' These are reasonable answers to the question at hand. But the Lord responds: *'Strive to enter through the narrow door.'*

We ask this question every day. *'Lord, will those who are saved be few?'* 'Lord, will those with secret sins be saved?' 'Lord, will those who rarely went to Church be saved?' 'Lord, will those who never heard the name of Christ because they lived in the darkest jungles be saved?' 'Lord, will those who are sexually deviant be saved?' 'Lord, will those who are transgender be saved?' 'Lord, will those deceived into false doctrines be saved?' 'Lord will the Nazi who repents at the last minute be saved?' 'Lord, will stillborn infants be saved?' 'Lord, will suicides be saved?'

The Lord silences all such meaningless questions, for whether you know the answer to these questions or not, it will benefit you none at all. They are meaningless. Who shall be encouraged by knowing who else will burn? Who will be edified by knowing who will be cast into darkness? Who will be brought to love by knowing to whom the Lord will give eternal death?

No one, for it is not your place to judge. Neither is it your place to speculate who shall be judged. So it is written *'Judge not, lest ye be judged.'* For to the one who wonders about the *speck in the eye of another*, so shall *a log* be forced into his

own, a bloodied spike; for the *eye that seeks out sin*, such is the *eye that causes one to sin*, and it is *better that this eye be gouged out than that the whole body be cast into hell*. For *'there is only one lawgiver and one judge, who is able to save and to destroy. Who art thou to judgest another?'* As it is written: *'The judgment is God's'*.

So the Lord says to you: *'Strive to enter through the narrow door.'* Think of your own salvation, *working it out in fear and trembling*. Contemplate not the sins and weaknesses of your neighbor, your friend, your enemy, your wife, your husband, your son. *Each day has evil enough for itself*. And so does each person have enough evil for himself. Therefore you, *look not to the left or to the right*, criticize not those about you, but look forward, to the *narrow door*.

Strive, our Lord tells us, *for wide is the way that leads to destruction*. But there is a *'narrow door.'* Strive, that you might not be distracted by the faults and weaknesses of others. Are you not crippled by your own sin? Are you not weighed down by your own wrath? Your own cynicism? Your own avarice? Your own lust? Your own faithlessness? You are maimed and mutilated. A broken person; but the door is ahead of you, now hear your God, and *strive*.

Often read is the prophesy at the end of Isaiah, wherein it is written: *'For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD.'*

Yet less often read are the final verses of this same prophesy, for it is there written: *'And they shall go out and look upon the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.'*

Shall your neighbor know the *new moon to new moon*? Or shall he be *an abhorrence to all flesh*? This is what the man asks Christ. This is what we ask God. But God has no patience for such foolish conjecture. There is *one thing needful*. Remember, what our Lord not so long ago spoke to busy Martha? *One thing needful*. Nothing else is of importance to you, for the Lord who provides for the *ravens of the air and the lilies of the field* shall concern Himself with all else. But to you, there is *one thing needful*. Therefore, I tell you again, *strive*.

There is a narrow door, that leads to a narrow room, that leads to a small table. I see it. Do you not? Do you not walk through a narrow hall, shuffle into narrow pews, all to process to a narrow rail?

Behold, 'you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg for silence' but 'have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.'

The blood cries out, this blood upon the altar, even as it once cried to you *'strive'*, now it speaks to you *'a better word than the blood of Abel.'*

'Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.' Come to Zion, to the city of the living God, to this humble table made more glorious than every work of man or Satan or Gabriel; made glorious by the blood which now dwells upon it. Itself the narrow path; itself the gate; itself the city; itself the completion and end of all things.

For *'out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth, Our God comes; he does not keep silence.'* Indeed, He is not silent, for His blood speaks a better word.

Draw near, and take of the chalice, [eat and drink in his presence], and hear the declaration of the Lord:

'I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.'

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*Preached by Pastor
Fields*

Sermon texts: Isaiah

66:18-23; Psalm 50:1-15; Hebrews 12:4-29; Luke 13:22-30