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“The Door of Life”

Text: Luke 13:22-30

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

The Israelis are in the process of building a wall around a good part of their country. From what I have seen of it on TV, it looks to be some 15-20 feet tall. They are building it because they want to keep Palestinians out of their country – especially Palestinians with explosives strapped around their waists. And if you want to keep people out, that’s what you do – you build a wall.

Now the Israelis are not the first to come up with this idea and do it. Many ancient cities (like Jerusalem) were built with walls around them, to keep out their enemies. The Great Wall of China was built to stop invaders from the North. In more modern times, there was the Berlin Wall. There is even a wall along part of the southern border of the United States – an attempt to keep out illegal immigrants. And then, even closer to home, there are walls around construction sites. Walls separate houses. You have probably even heard the saying: fences make good neighbors.

But when you have a wall, then you may also have a door. And the purpose of a door is not to keep people out, but exactly the opposite – to create an entrance. To create a place where people may pass through, when otherwise they may have been totally shut out, or excluded. A door, or a gate, or some other opening is therefore good news. It means that you have a chance of getting to the other side.

And that is how we should hear the words of Jesus in the Holy Gospel today. As good news. There is a door. A door to salvation. A door into Heaven. And while it may be narrow, it is a door . . . and it is not yet closed.

But if there is a door, that means there must be a wall, and indeed there is – it is the wall of sin which we have erected between us and God. The wall of sin which separates all of us from God. God didn’t create that wall, and indeed, it wasn’t there in the beginning. God walked and talked freely with Adam and Eve in the Garden, until they opted for something they thought better, and the wall was built. Satan told them it wouldn’t be a big deal . . . but it was. A wall of sin. A wall of fear. A wall of shame. A wall of sadness. A wall of guilt. A wall of death. And in this wall there was no door, no opening, no crack, no hope, no way out. But, no big deal, Satan said.

And you know, there are still people today insisting that this wall is no big deal. Some, because they choose to live their lives without God. But then there are some who buy

into this notion because they think that if we are good enough, or smart enough, or emotional or zealous enough, that we can overcome this wall. It is a barrier, yes, but not insurmountable. Each of us has the ability to overcome this wall – for if we built it, then we must *certainly* be able to find a way out, or over, or under, or through, or *something*. And so you will often hear teaching telling you to try harder, to think more positively, to find your inner strength, to become revved up or on fire, to do whatever it takes! **“Strive to enter!”** That is what Jesus said, isn’t it?

But if you’ve tried this, then you know that the more you try to get past this wall, the more you just wind up beating your head *against* this wall. As Jesus said, **“Many will seek to enter, and will not be able to.”** And so while we may try hard, our strength eventually fails us, and we get tired and frustrated and finally just want to give up. We try to think more positively, but then the sin and struggles and realities of this world intrude and fill our minds with all kinds of negatives – from terrorism to hurricanes to diseases to fear to shame to death. We look inside ourselves for strength, and find only weakness and disappointment and sin. And revved up and on fire? Right! – whose got the time or the energy? . . . Truth is, it’s hard enough just striving to finish another week sometimes . . . when God seems so far away, and life seems so hard.

And if this is what it takes to enter, then the answer to this person’s question that we heard, **“Lord, will those who are saved be few?”** . . . the answer must be yes.

But, the answer is also no. There are, in fact, *many* who will be saved, for as Jesus later says, **“people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.”** We heard that same thought echoed in the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah. For the good news, as Jesus said, is that there is a door. A door punched through this wall of sin and death – not from this side, by us; but from heaven, by God. By our God who could not tolerate our sin, but who also could not tolerate separation from us. And so there is a way. There is a way out of sin. Out of the separation between us and God. Out of this world of suffering and death and into life. Out of hopelessness and into hope. Out of fear and into confidence. That is what God promised to Adam and Eve after they sinned. That there would be One who would come and overcome this wall, bringing heaven to earth, and taking us from earth to heaven. And this is what Jesus was teaching as He went through the towns and villages, making His way to Jerusalem. That He was the One. The One who through His incarnation brought heaven to earth, and the One who through His death and resurrection takes us from earth to heaven.

And so Jesus was going to Jerusalem to accomplish this work. To be the door. The door bringing heaven to earth, and taking us from earth to heaven – and *both* directions are necessary and important. For Jesus is concerned about all of your life – not just your life here or there, but your life both here and there. And so He has provided for all. Not just part, and then part is up to you. He has done it all.

And so Jesus comes and brings you life from heaven. He comes here and now through His Holy Word, Holy Absolution, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion. He comes to take away those things that rob us of life, and in their place give us His life. And so through these means, He gives **forgiveness** and takes away the sin and guilt that drive us to despair. He gives **hope** and takes away the fears that rob us of our confidence. He gives **faith** and takes away the doubts that cause us so much worry and anxiety. He gives **love** and takes away the hatred and anger and selfishness that separate us from each other. And with these gifts He gives life – the life from heaven that Satan so wants to rob from us. Jesus has come to rob the robber of His prey. He is the door that brings the life of heaven down to earth.

Yet as we live this life He gives and enables, it is in the knowledge that there is an even greater life waiting for us, and for this He too is the door. For joined to Him and living in Him by faith, when this life ends, His death and resurrection will be our death and resurrection, and the entrance to eternal life with Him. And to pass through this door, you do not need to be the best, or the smartest, or the most devoted, or meet a certain criteria. You need only be in Him. In Jesus, the One who takes you from earth to heaven. If we try to approach heaven apart from Him, on our own, on the basis of our own merits or achievements, then it is the words we heard in the Holy Gospel that will be spoken to us: ***“I do not know where you come from.”*** But the door is open for those who come in Jesus, in His cross, in His death and resurrection. For these God knows. And those who come in these, God knows. For as we have lived in these, through confession and repentance, through forgiveness and the life our Saviour gives, He has known us all along. And we who are probably considered last by the criteria of the world, will be first in the kingdom of God.

And so when Jesus says, ***“Strive to enter through the narrow door,”*** He is not directing us to ourselves, or our own strength and abilities – but to Himself. To stay in Him through Word and Sacrament. To stay in Him as our life. For the door to heaven is as narrow as the cross, for the cross is the only door. But it is also as wide as the cross, for the cross is for all. And to all Jesus now comes. To forgive, renew, and strengthen. He comes to give life. No one is out of His reach, no one beyond His care. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Collect for the Day), and He wants to be this for all. And so we have hope, for ourselves, and for others. . . . You know, sometimes the cares and troubles of this life make us forget that, and we fall back into the trap of thinking that we have to do it. We have to find life. We have to find the door. We have to . . . (whew!) I sound tired just saying it! . . . No. Your Saviour has done it. And so when life crashes down on you (again!), or when the cares of this world seem overwhelming, or when sin takes hold and we too wonder, ***“Lord, will those who are saved be few?”*** ***“Will I even be saved?”*** You have here a refuge and an answer and a yes – in the cross of your Saviour. For He is the One who came and strove with sin, Satan, and death, and won. And joined to Him and alive in Him, that victory is yours, and the door is open.

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