

SERMON FOR AUGUST 21, 2022

TEXT: LUKE 13: 22-30

THEME: CREDIBLE CHRISTIANITY

22 He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. **23** And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, **24** “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. **25** When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ **26** Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ **27** But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ **28** In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. **29** And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. **30** And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

In the name of Jesus:

When I was a child I loved watching the game show hosted by Monty Hall called “Let’s Make a Deal.” I believe Wayne Brady hosts the show now. The premise is that the contestants will come to the studio ready to make a deal, swap the hat they are wearing for a chance to win a prize. Deal the sign they are carrying for an opportunity to win money. At the end of the show, the winners have a chance to pick one of three doors, they are given the chance to trade what they have won for the chance of winning a bigger prize, by

choosing what is behind doors number one, two, or three. Virtually everyone wins something, because at the end of the show they would put a disclaimer on the screen saying that all participants would get a nice parting gift. Thus, just for being there, they leave the show feeling good, and in the grand prize game, the ultimate winner would be the one who picked the grand prize behind door number one, two or three. The game really lost its credibility for me, because the element of competing for a prize is lost, everyone wins something in the end.

Some former sports fans have lost interest in their favorite team because they have read or heard about wagers being placed on games, and the results of said games being fixed. These former fans have lost interest because the games have lost credibility.

So how is credibility defined? Credibility can be defined as the art or ability of being able to trust in something or someone. If something isn't credible, it isn't believable.

I thought about this as I read the Gospel lesson for today. Sadly, today, for many, Christianity is no longer a credible faith. What I mean by that is that for many today, Christianity is no longer credible because they have held a faulty view of Christianity and what faith in Jesus really means. They begin with having or holding a wrong premise, and so when Christianity

doesn't measure up to their expectations., they then walk away from the faith. They look at their lives and see that life isn't going their way, their lives are filled with what seems to be unanswered prayer requests and unrealized blessings. They hear television preachers talking about how following Jesus and giving their lives to Jesus means innumerable earthly blessings. They are promised a heaven here on earth. And when their dreams go unfilled, they become disenchanted with the Church and unrealized dreams they heard about. The promised earthly blessings don't match with the earthly reality. Thus Christianity loses, for these folks, credibility.

In our text for today, Jesus gives to those following Him then, and to we who follow Him now, a reality check. Up to this point in Jesus' ministry, the followers of Jesus have seen many miracles. The lame walk, the hungry are fed, dead are raised to life again. Life with Jesus, it seems, is like a game show, where everyone who believes in Him gets what they want in the end.. But Jesus tells them something entirely different, following Him is not easy and is never easy. Following Jesus is hard, it is difficult, that is why He says, "Strive to enter through the narrow door."

Jesus warns His disciples and us that following Him will not be easy. If you follow Jesus thinking that you will live life on "Easy Street", you are going to be bitterly disappointed. If you think following Jesus will lead to Jesus

giving you innumerable physical blessings, Jesus warns about loving the physical blessings more than Him. And Jesus speaks directly to each of His followers, telling them that they most certainly will have their share of difficulties as a result of following Jesus.

God's love in Jesus extends to all. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. Jesus came, not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for all those who are bound and held captive to sin and death. That is why Jesus set His face towards Jerusalem, because the way of Jesus is the way of the cross. He bids those who would follow Him to take up the cross and follow Him, and He further explains that in this world there will be trials and tribulations, and there will be many of them.

That is the stark truth about Christianity. It isn't easy. It cost Jesus His life, all so that He would make you His own and that you would belong to Him in His Kingdom. His Kingdom is not of this world. Jesus didn't come to grant you your every wish, He came to save you. He gave His life for you, and rose for you, to overcome sin, Satan, and death for you. There is a cost to Christianity. Jesus came to save sinners. If you don't believe you are a sinner, you don't need Jesus. His Kingdom is open to all, He has paid the price for every sinner to be forgiven and to be a member of His kingdom. But Jesus warns us today that not everyone will embrace His kingdom.

Jesus isn't interested in people who are vaguely familiar with Him, what He wants are people who believe in Him and will follow Him. That is why He says that if you love your father or mother more than me you aren't worthy of Me. Christ desires that you love Him with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. Sadly today many are familiar with Jesus, but don't believe in Him. And even more sadly, there are those who follow Jesus who act as if they are merely familiar with Him instead of following Him. Going through the motions of following Jesus doesn't cut it. Jesus knows your heart, He knows you. So repent, confess your sin, receive Christ's forgiveness, then live as His disciple.

Jesus tells us what discipleship looks like in the Gospel lesson for today. Following Jesus is hard, it is a battle, as Satan seeks to use the culture and the world to entice you away from Jesus. Following Jesus is a lifelong struggle to follow Him, holding on to Him for dear life, all the while you are battling sin, Satan, and death. And when the struggle seems too much for you, Jesus is there, to give you His grace which is sufficient to meet your every need. His grace cannot be defeated by the Devil, the world, death, or our sinful flesh.

That is why Jesus tells you to strive to enter through the narrow door. What He means is that you are to continue to strive, fight, and daily struggle with that which seeks to take away your faith. Like an athlete that trains for a competition, you are to daily train to follow Christ. It means that worship and

Bible study will form the basis of your life. It means that you will regularly receive the Lord's gifts in Holy Communion. It means that you will assess how your daily walk with Christ is going by asking such questions as "am I putting my faith into practice?" "Is my life rooted in worship, Bible study and communion?" "Am I showing love to my neighbor, and how am I doing that?"

These things are non-negotiables for Jesus. He doesn't say this is something He would like us to do. He says strive, and struggle continuously to enter through the narrow door. Take your faith seriously, and earnestly seek to live for Jesus!

Why? Because Jesus loves you! He lived for you, He died for you, He rose for you, and He lives for you today. He has saved you and has given to you your faith, so that you can show your faith to others in all that you do. In doing so, you will show the reality of Jesus and His love for all.

May God grant it to the glory of God and in Jesus' name.

Amen