

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – 2025

Isaiah 66:18-23

Hebrews 12:4-29

Luke 13:22-30

Linda Ronstadt had a tremendous set of pipes. For those of you who don't know who Linda Ronstadt is, she was a wildly popular singer from the late '60's and 70's. To have a great set of pipes means that you possess a terrific singing voice – pipes, like an organ or some woodwind instrument. Ronstadt had range, power, quality of tone, variety of delivery, and a sweet sincerity. She recorded an Everly Brothers song that many of you know. Here are a few lines: I've been cheated ~ Been mistreated ~ When will I be loved? I've been put down ~ I've been pushed 'round ~ When will I be loved? I've been made blue ~ I've been lied to ~ When will I be loved?

The song is about giving your heart to the wrong suitor. It gets tiresome. Have you ever heard of someone having a “bad picker?” To have a bad picker, or to have a “broken” picker means that the individual is consistently choosing unhealthy, incompatible, or problematic partners – people who regularly take advantage of the individual. It's said that people are often drawn to what is familiar, even if it is unhealthy. The song also pines for true love. The song knows the value of genuine love, the value of one who looks out for our best interest, who elevates our spirit, our character, our security.

Strive to enter through the narrow door. Jesus is asked a question that may be on your mind. When you look around this world and see the things that you see, perhaps you think, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” The question is prompting Jesus to give an affirmative answer. The questioner is asking about others, not himself. The questioner keeps the issue vague, generic, at arm's length. Take note! Jesus answers the question not by talking about those who will be saved, but by talking about those who *won't* get in. Those people are going to be shocked! Not just colossally bummed out but shocked! What? “We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets” (Luke 13:26). Sounds like they thought that they were connected. They weren't.

Do you believe that this world is a spiritually safe place? It's not. Nothing could go wrong here for a Christian, right? No one would lie to us, right? No one would actually lead us astray, away from Christ, away from the truth, selling us on spiritual snake oil or take advantage of our fallen nature, our lust for money, our carnal appetites, our base nature, right? You're lied to everyday. The beer commercials are lying to you. The perfume commercials are lying to you. The car commercials are lying to you. I've been cheated; been mistreated; when will I be loved? Those lies are about making your lives better. It's a seduction, a false pretense, a promise that never delivers. Satan made that promise in the Garden of Eden. More – bigger, better, faster. Indulgence, eroticism, and power – lies, lies, lies.

Strive to enter through the narrow door. When Jesus told the Parable of the Sower, He mentioned that some of the seed fell among the thorns. Do you remember this? “... the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain” (Mark 4:7). We don't have to guess what this means. Jesus tells us: “And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other

things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful” (Mark 4:18-19). Thorns; are you at least aware that this world has an abundance of thorns and that you are a target for their prick. Your soul – how much value are you yourself placing on your soul, your eternal soul? Strive to enter through the narrow door.

In the book of Genesis, in the account of the flood, the Scripture says: “And the Lord shut [Noah] in” (Genesis 7:17). The implication is that the Lord shut everyone else out. The ark was salvation for those eight people. The ark was God’s design to protect Noah and his family from destruction. The door was shut. God shut the door. Outside the ark, every living thing perished (Genesis 7:23). On the last day, when Jesus comes, you and I will be judged. Faith; does Christ’s blood cover us or doesn’t it? Faith; have you protected the faith that God has breathed into you or have you treated it like an assumed commodity, like a vehicle that you never change the oil or a pair of old shoes that you refuse to shine? Strive to enter through the narrow door. It will be brutal for those without faith on the Last Day. Panic, a radical sense of regret, a pained sense of loss, their foolish pursuits in life that diminished faith, diminished the ark of Christ’s church, will descend on them and the grief will be unbearable. Jesus brings their radical panic and puts in your lap. Why? To teach you, to wake you up, to put the importance of the end in your head now.

Strive to enter through the narrow door. The narrow door – what do you suppose that is? In Matthew’s Gospel account, Jesus says this: “... the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matthew 7:13-14). Christianity is not easy. Feeding your soul takes discipline. Some who stayed near to Christ in the early 2000’s are not staying near him now. The gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many. What pulls you away from Christ? Mark it and avoid it! Can you do that? Here’s a proverb that I like: “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23 NIV). “Strive to enter through the narrow door” sounds an awful lot like “guard your heart.” That is our calling. Our Lord said this to us, and we take it seriously.

Strive to enter through the narrow door. There is only one path to salvation. There is only one God, one Savior. Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the way, the truth, and the life and that no one comes unto the Father except through Him (John 14:6). Jesus is your narrow door. Only Him; only His blood; only His righteousness; only His death; only His resurrection; Jesus is your narrow door. You are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). His righteousness is credited to your account as a gift when you believe that He died and rose for you. His righteousness has washed you into Holy Baptism. His Spirit has been made to dwell in you. We baptized a Jr. this morning. Jonathan, Jr.; The old English word for baptism is “Christening.” Jonathan Jr. was “Christed” this morning, made like His Lord. Jonathan, Jr. entered the ark of the church through the narrow door. Here, with the family of faith, Jonathan will learn of grace, learn of divine love, learn of a very present Lord who loves him specifically. And Jonathan will be taught to strive, to hold fast to the truth, to guard his heart.

Jesus entered a narrow door. Jesus strove to enter that door by laying down His life. On a Friday, a good Friday, Jesus strove against our sin. He bore it. He endured the attacks of Satan, the barbs of cruel men, the mockery, the whipping and the nailing and the pain. He strove to

enter the narrow door of His tomb by defeating our enemies, by crushing the head of the serpent and rendering death a vanquished and powerless force. The narrow door of His tomb looked imposing on Friday. It looked entirely different on Sunday. Christ is our narrow door. His death and resurrection is light to our soul, food for our faith, and fire in our heart. The Everly Brothers song, the Linda Ronstadt song asked mournfully, "When will I be loved?" We are loved now. Christ's love fills this room. By the Holy Spirit, our "picker" is spot on. Even better, He chose *us* before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). We did not choose Him, but He chose us (John 15:16). That is the love that stirs within you. That is the love that prompts you to strive to enter heaven through the narrow door.