

Pentecost 14
August 21, 2016

Text: Luke 13:22-30

Theme: Apathy to Agony

It's that time of year when kids go off to college. Colleges have all sorts of clubs. Just looking at the list at Carroll University, a rather small private college, there are clubs and student organizations. Things like the fishing club, curling club, photography club, psychology club, Big Brothers/Big Sisters. All these groups that highlight student special interests. Have you ever heard of an apathy club? It's the one to which no one shows up because the members are all apathetic about it. Do you feel that way sometimes? Maybe about work. Maybe about a hobby. Maybe even about church and your relationship with Jesus.

In our text for today, Jesus is faced with a question that many of us have perhaps mused over in some form or another. **Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?** It feels like that sometimes when we look around at our world. We're such a small portion of our city. WELS is such a small percentage of our country. And Christians make up only about 1/3 of the world's population. If you've been raised in the church, you may be taking it for granted. If you've served year after year on every board and never said "no" when anyone asks you to help with something around here. Maybe you too become apathetic when you see so relatively few here in worship and Bible Class. Maybe you become apathetic when it seems like there's so little immediate impact when we put effort in to outreach events. Maybe you become apathetic when nothing changes at church or when things change at church. We are emotional beings, products of our surroundings, who thrive on outward success and numbers. When it's lacking, sometimes we get apathetic.

But Jesus uses that question not to focus on the big picture. Rather he directs you to look at yourself. **Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.** He's talking to you. When you become frustrated and disenchanted with what you see in the life of the church, it might be because we're trying to create a new and bigger door rather than on the door he has given. Jesus directs you to focus really on two related things, you and the narrow door. In the narrow door he pictures the way to eternal life. It's narrow because contrary to popular belief today, there is only one way to enter through it and that's through Jesus perfect life and innocent all-sufficient death alone. And it takes effort, not to earn that way, but to stay on that way, to continue to spiritual fight in which you were engaged when he claimed you as his own through faith. Making the journey through the narrow door takes single-minded focus to stay on the path, when all of the other paths seem so attractive and come with such ease.

When the sinful nature wants to take credit for something you've done as if to merit God's mercy. When the world tempts you to water down the truth to fit in more with a culture standing opposed to God. When the devil uses the most familiar lie of all to lead you to think that God has somehow been unfaithful or withheld from you what you really need. These are the new doors that are created. Newer, bigger, broader doors presenting a way to heaven that is different, better and bigger than the one God has actually revealed on the pages of Holy Scripture. How can you possibly stand up under such pressure, so common a cause that comes from seemingly every outlet, channel and side today? How can you possibly see, much less enter through, the narrow door?

It's back to the word. The solution to our disenchantment with the life of the church begins with taking ourselves back to the word in both worship and in Bible Study. The narrow door is found in letting the Word of God stand and submitting our rational minds and worldly visions to what it says, rather than making what it says subject to the way we want it to be. And therein lies the effort of which Jesus speaks. The word there translated make every effort is the same one from which we get the word, agony. It's hard, even agonizing, to sort through all of the stuff that others put in our way. It's agonizing sometimes, to turn aside from the peer pressure of the world in which we live to twist and change and alter the meanings of the black on white words of Scripture. It's agonizing to be accountable to someone that's unseen when those who are seen are standing right in front of us widening the door.

But agonizing on the right things is the antidote to spiritual apathy that so infects us. Agonizing in the way that Jesus uses that word today with what God says and letting his counter-cultural message of a narrow door opened to us and to all through Jesus alone stand compels us as we see that for the time that narrow door remains open though a times is coming when it will be too late, for us and for others. As we agonize rightly over God's Word, we find there is no room for apathy only more work proclaiming this narrow door of Jesus, that many more might find in him eternal life. The salvation of lost souls everywhere demands our faith-filled striving toward that end.