

Journey through the Narrow Door

August 26, 2007

(Pentecost 13 - Year C)

Luke 13: 22-30

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

As some of you know, Susan and I traveled up to Michigan earlier this month to participate in a wedding.

After the wedding, we traveled up the coast of Lake Michigan to Mackinac Island, at the very top of the state of Michigan.

On that Sunday afternoon when we drove up the coast, we were very anxious to get to where we were going;

We were anxious to start relaxing at the luxurious Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island.

However, our journey to Mackinac took us much longer than we expected, because the highway took us through the middle of town after town after town along the coast.

Every single one of those little towns that we passed through was picturesque and beautiful, with unbelievable views of Lake Michigan.

As we rounded each bend, I would say to Susan:

“Oh, look at the view of the Lake.”

Then, after a few minutes, I would say:

“Wow, look at that view of the Lake.”

Finally, Susan yelled out:

“I am so tired of looking at Lake Michigan!

I just wanna hurry up and get to where we are going!”

In the Gospel of Luke that we heard this morning, the writer of the Gospel takes extra care to tell us where Jesus is going.

The writer says that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem;

He was on a journey.

But, the people following Jesus don't seem to care much about the journey.

The people want to know more about the destination.

So they ask Jesus:

“Lord, will only a few be saved?”

In other words, they are really asking:

“Will only a few people reach the destination?”

Yet, Jesus pretty much ignores the question.

Because Jesus is just as concerned with the journey as he is with the destination.

So, he replies:

“Strive to enter through the narrow door.”

To Jesus, it is not only about *where* we are going.

To Jesus, it is also about *how* we are going to get there.

We can make a decision to take the wide and fast track down the interstate highway, lined with an endless stream of McDonald’s and Burger Kings.

Or we can strive to enter by the narrow door, taking a harder and slower road, on a journey that is lined with picturesque towns and wonderful views of the lake.

For some people in this church, a new school year is now beginning.

We celebrate this new beginning as we bless the backpacks and bookbags that our students and teachers and professors and administrators will place around our altar today.

The temptation for our students and for our teachers will be to focus purely on the destination, and to miss out on the journey.

The temptation for our students and our teachers will be to only focus on grade point averages and TAKS test results and lesson plans and tenure tracks.

Yet, the journey of education is lined with new discoveries and with wonderful views of people who are very different from us.

In the early history of the Church, the first Christians were not known as Christians.

The first Christians were called “followers of the Way.”

The first Christians were not known by their destination, but they were known as the Way, because of the way of faith that each one of them was walking.

The first Christians were not known by who was saved and who was not saved,

But they were known by their journey, by their way of striving to enter through the narrow door.

The temptation for Episcopalians is to think that we are “done.” That we are finished products: baptized, confirmed and just waiting around for God to take us to our final destination.

But we are a people of the Way.

We are a people on a journey, a people striving to enter through the narrow door.

This fall at St. Alban’s, we are offering Bible Study Fellowship Groups that will study the Gospel of Mark for 8 weeks, in homes or here at the church.

I would bet that there are some of you who are thinking:

“I don’t have time for that.

I don’t need to learn more or get to know anybody else in this church.”

Then, my response to each of you is that maybe a Bible Study Group is your narrow door.

And maybe you need to strive to push through that door.

Now, I cannot guarantee you that you will get into heaven.

I cannot guarantee you as to what will be on the other side of the door.

But, I do know that a journey through a book of the Bible, with people whom you will learn to love and know, will be an unforgettable journey, a journey that will be filled with unexpected and wonderful views.

For Jesus is not just concerned with the destination - but how we get there.

And, if Jesus did not care about the journey,

If Jesus had only cared about the destination,

Then Jesus would never have made his way to Jerusalem.

Jesus’ mind was not just focused on his heavenly destination.

Jesus’ mind was focused on his earthly crucifixion, on his journey to Jerusalem and to the Cross.

Jesus was focused on that narrow door.

And you might not have known it, but here at St. Alban's, we have a wood carving of that narrow door.

That wood carving of that narrow door hangs over our altar.

We call that narrow door: The Cross.

When we look up at that Cross, we are looking at the narrow door that Jesus has entered through.

When we look at the Cross, we are looking at the narrow door that we are striving to push through.

And the journey to the cross - the journey through the narrow door - is hard, it involves suffering, it involves making tough decisions, tough decisions that effect our everyday life.

So make a decision this year to not just focus on your grades in school, but also focus on learning as much as you can, on not cheating on tests, and on experiencing new things.

Make a decision to not just focus on getting a raise at your job, but also focus on helping out your co-workers and not contributing to office gossip and backstabbing.

Make a decision to not just focus on getting into heaven, but also focus on studying Scripture, on prayer, and on giving your time and your money back to God.

Because life is *not* only about the destination.

It is *not* about who is and who isn't going to be saved.

It is all about the journey, the long hard way, the tough decisions, the narrow door.

My friends, it is all about...the Cross.

AMEN.