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14th Sunday after Pentecost
25 August 2013
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Luke 13:22-30

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

“Jesus went on His way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying *toward Jerusalem.*”

Everything with Christ is always toward *Jerusalem.*

Whether you're in the middle of Leviticus or plowing through one of the prophets,
you're heading toward *Jerusalem.*

And if you're pondering Paul's epistles, or wading through Revelation,
spending time in home devotions, or listening to a sermon—
it's all toward *Jerusalem.*

But what good is Jerusalem?

Is it a place of comfort and ease?

A kingdom like *Elysium*, without struggle or pain or agony?

Is it an ideal or a dream?

Is your idea of Jerusalem one where children don't cry,
where incessant talkers are muted,
or where lines never last more than a minute?

Is Jerusalem free from gossips and drunks and adulterers?

Are there no back-stabbers or dead-beat dads?

Is your Jerusalem of no cost to you?

With no distractions?

No pressures from parents or schools or governments or bosses?

No one telling you what to do?

Can you finally have a moment to yourself in your Jerusalem?

Some time to pray or worship without something else tugging at your attention?

Are you finally able to give the way you want, without feeling bad or neglecting something else?

Is your Jerusalem easy?

Is it *real*?

There are two Jerusalems running through today's Gospel.

One is real, the other make-believe.

One, Jesus knows—intimately;
the other's foreign to Him.

And if everything's heading towards Jerusalem—which is it for you?

Are you heading the way of the true Jerusalem—

the one filled with back-stabbing friends, murderous priests, mob-rule for a government,
with a cross at the end?

Or are you heading towards some make-believe Jerusalem,
 a figment of your imagination, where suffering and sacrifice are synonymous with
 sacrilege?

Jesus only knows a real Jerusalem.
 And the Jerusalem He's journeying and teaching towards is a messy Jerusalem.

So you can't blame whoever it was that asked in today's Gospel:
"Lord, will those who are saved be few?" (13:23)

"Someone asked," is all Luke says.
 Was it Peter or Judas?
 Or was it you?

We all wonder.
 We wonder whether the guy next to us will make it in.
 We wonder about our parents and children, our friends and classmates.
 We wonder about babies who die during birth, or shortly after.
 We wonder about the jungle folk in Zimbabwe.
 We wonder whether we'll be pleasantly surprised by how many are there!
 Or whether we'll be terrified about how few there are.
 And then, if we wonder long enough, we eventually wonder if we'll be there too.

Will those being saved be few?

Good question, but Jesus doesn't let us ask about others.

To ask about "*those*" is to distance ourselves from others.
 It's to speak *hypothetically*, or imaginatively.
 And whenever you enter the imagination, especially our own, you leave suffering behind.

But what does Jesus say?

He says,

You strive.

You pick up your cross and *you* follow Me.

You repent and *you* be baptized.

You take and eat.

You, who are blessed by My Father, recline at the table in the kingdom of God.

In those "you's" there's both Law and Gospel.
 There's commands and punishments for sinful you.
 And there's promises and blessings for the saintly you.

What that means for us Christians is that we must constantly remember what Jerusalem is like.
 We must know where we're heading—
 that it's messy!

There's no heavenly Jerusalem apart from the earthly.
 No salvation apart from damnation.
 No heaven without hell.

Jerusalem is a paradox.

It's the city of David, the promised land, where Temple and Palace and Kingdom come together.
 But its none of those apart from the cross.

Same goes with this Church—that spotless bride of Christ.

In this Jerusalem, you'll miss something here and there.
 You'll lose your cool and say something you regret.
 You'll find that you've learned something wrong your whole life,
 or that you've been right all along, and you're pastor's just led you astray.
 In this Jerusalem, there's pain, and hurt, and unexpected pregnancies, and divorce—
 and it's never quite the way we'd like it.

But if these things didn't exist in this Jerusalem, why would Jesus ever journey towards it?

What good is Jesus if everything's worked out already?
 What good is a savior if you've got nothing to be saved from?

So Jesus says to us, "*Strive to enter through the narrow door.*" (13:24)
 In Greek, the word is *agonizomai*—or, *agonize*!
 And just so there's no confusion, this agony isn't some works-righteousness.
 The agony isn't in order to get *into* the kingdom of God,
 but once you've been set on the narrow way, the way toward Jerusalem,
 you'll find the way is the way of the Cross—
 agony and all.

That's the narrow door.
 The narrow door is the way of reality—of suffering and contradiction.
 The way of being a Christian isn't in a classroom or a monastery.
 It's not theoretical or free from distraction.
 The narrow door is the way of the cross.
 And it's hard.

It means self-sacrifice.
 It means giving beyond your means to this Church for the sake of the Gospel.
 It means loving that member you really can't stand.
 It means being here, in the Divine Service, at Bible Study,
 wherever the Word is preached and the Sacraments given out;
 not because you feel like going—let's be honest, we don't always feel like it—
 but because that's where Jesus has called you to be,
 and where He has promised to be *for you*.

This is the narrow door, the way toward Jerusalem.
 This is where weeping and gnashing of teeth are part of the journey,
 but on the other side He wipes away every tear from our eyes.

That's the paradox: death and life, heaven and hell, weeping and joy—
 and Jerusalem stands at the center of it all.
 And the center of Jerusalem is the cross of Christ.

And the narrow door only has room for One to enter—that's Jesus.
 Only He has agonized under the weight of the sins of the world.
 You're only hope to enter is to become nothing, to bring nothing with you,
 to be united with Christ Himself, that where He goes you go too.

And as you know, the cross isn't the end of the journey.
 From the cross His life-less body is laid in the grave, and with Him, you also.
 And on the third day He comes back to life,
 rises from the grave,
 and conquers this world for the next.

But this is where it gets difficult: the events of the resurrection aren't good news for all.
Though they should be!

Jesus says, "*When once the Master has risen...*" (v.25),
 that is, once the resurrection occurs,
 then the doors are shut.

We think of the resurrection as the breaking of the doors, smashing the gates of Hades.
 And yet here, while those doors are smashed and the prisoners are set free,
 the doors to the kingdom of heaven are slammed shut.

What prevents the Master from opening the door?
 Why doesn't He know them who knock?

It seems they're strangers to the cross.
 Their Jerusalem isn't the Jerusalem of suffering,
 but the Jerusalem of power and pride.

For them the door's been wide and easy, ignorant of suffering along the way—Christ included.

And though they claim that He taught in their streets and dined with them,
 their word and sacrament came apart from the cross.

But you, *strive through the narrow door*.
 Agonize under the cross.
 For that's where we're heading: to Jerusalem with Christ.

He's our king, even when it doesn't seem like He's all that victorious.
Jerusalem's our heaven,
 where all are gathered together, from north and south and east and west,
 where those who are last, are received first.
 And all recline at the table together.

And the table is ready.
The cross is here.
The last are made first,
 and the poor made rich,
 and the sinful are forgiven and called saints.

Here's your Jerusalem—a paradox, to be sure—and it hardly looks like it should.
But this is where Jesus is.
And He's here for you.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit