

STRIVE TO ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW DOOR. FOR MANY, I TELL YOU WILL SEEK TO ENTER AND WILL NOT BE ABLE.

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome brought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back (Mk 16:1-3).

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Yes, I know, relax, the calendar tells us it is August, the 14th Sunday after Pentecost, not Easter Sunday. But yet, I remind you, my Dear Friends in Christ, that we worship on Sunday because that is the day Jesus rose from the dead. Every Sunday is a celebration of our Lord's resurrection; every Sunday is a mini-Easter. And how Jesus' words in our Gospel this Sunday remind us of that. "Strive," Jesus says, "to enter through that narrow "θυρας".

That's the Greek word. And you know this word. Sure you do. If your hair falls out, you have no energy, you loss weight, have no appetite, you go to your doctor and he or she, being a trained, highly-educated medical profession, will tell you your condition is obvious -- you are a Minnesota Vikings fan and another NFL season is about to start, and you already know how it will end. Folks, I want you to know I drove 1, 968 miles, and I spent the whole time thinking how I could work that into the sermon. No, what your doctor will do is check your thyroid, the "θυρας", the door, the entrance, to the body cavity.

Rejoice and be glad, for Jesus has open the door, the entrance, to heaven.

That door to Paradise is narrow and, in our sinfulness, we cannot open it. But we try. I love Question # 186 in our Small Catechism, “Why must we firmly hold to this teaching of justification by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith?” The answer: We must firmly hold to this teaching because

- A. It is the most important doctrine of the Christian religion;
- B. It distinguishes the Christian religion from false religions, all of which teach salvation by works.

Islam says that if you confess there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet; if you pray towards Mecca 5X/day; if you pay alms to benefit the poor and needy; if you fast during the month of Ramadan; and, if you can afford it, you make a pilgrimage to Mecca, you will enter Paradise. The Latter-day Saints, the Mormons, say that if you wear the right underwear, don’t drink coffee, and do a few other things, you will one day be your own god on your own planet. That is, if you are male; if you are female, you will be eternally pregnant, with your husband, the god, on his own planet. I’m not making this stuff up, folks. Roman Catholics, don’t eat meat on Friday, pray to Mary, do other nice things, and you might just get into heaven, after you have been cleansed of your sin in purgatory, and the grandkids have paid enough money to get you out of purgatory. And the Hindus, well you just keep come back in a different life form again and again in the lie of reincarnation, until you are good enough to go to paradise. And if you are bad, then you have to come back as a mosquito in North Dakota and start all over again, I guess.

Article 4 of the Augsburg Confession teaches us this:

Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight.

Our Lutheran Fathers taught this, because this is what the Bible teaches us, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9).

The Good News of the Christian faith is that you can enter through that narrow door to heaven because Jesus has opened it for you.

That's what He did for you at Jerusalem. There, He went to the cross carrying all of your sins of thought, word, and deed. There upon that cross, He bled and died for you, giving His blood and His life in death as payment for your sins. Three days after He did that, He rose again to bring you forgiveness, life, and salvation.

And He gives you that forgiveness, life, and salvation by means of baptism, His Word, and His body and blood that you eat and drink. He gives you that forgiveness, He gives you that life, He gives you that salvation, for you see, He strives in you, Dear Child of God.

He does that because there are those who would rather see you perish than recline at table in the Kingdom of God. There are those who would rather see you weeping and gnashing your teeth than be with Jesus. We call these people the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The Good News for you, Child of God, is that Jesus defeated the world, the flesh, and the devil when He died for you on Calvary and rose

again on Easter Sunday. But even though the decisive battle has been won, these unholy three know the war will be over until that day Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead. So, they make the most of their time. They come with all the energy and the lies they can to try to make sure you do not enter through that narrow door.

The world does that to you by coming to you with that lie that there is a door for the Muslims, a door for the Mormons, and the Hindus, and for everyone else because God is just a kind, old grandpa who would never condemn anyone, and besides, we are pretty good people. This lie leads straight to hell and that is why, Child of God, you strive against this lie because you believe and confess Jesus to be the way, the truth, and the life, the only door to salvation.

The flesh comes to you with temptation to sexual immorality, lying, drunkenness, gossip, coveting, hating because the flesh is not going to inherit the Kingdom of God. And if they can get you to live like that, all the better for them. But, you strive against that, you strive to enter through that narrow door because you confess your sins and receive God's forgiveness for the sake of Jesus your Lord.

And when it comes to the devil, He would rather see you cast out than in heaven. So, He seeks to make your life miserable by accidents, natural disasters, illness, people stealing and vandalizing your property. He does all that, but you strive against Him. You remember your baptism, when you renounced the devil, and all His works, and all His ways. And you remember when you said exactly the same thing at your Confirmation.

So, do you understand what Jesus means when He says to enter through the narrow door? He has saved you by grace through faith to

strive against your enemies which want to see you cast out and not inherit of heaven. He is calling upon you to strive against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

And, remember Jesus strives for you and with you. For you, He carried your sins to the cross and defeated your enemies by His dying and His rising the 3rd day. And now today, as He calls you to strive against the unholy three, He is still with you, with you to the end of the age. He is with you by means of your baptism, His Supper, and His Word to give you the forgiveness, the strength, the will that you need to strive against your enemies and enter through that narrow door when you will sit at table in the Kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and with those who will come from the east and west, and from the north and the south.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.