

August 21, 2016  
Luke 13:22-30

Proper 16c  
The Agony of Repentance

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*“Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many I tell you will seek to enter it and will not be able to.”* But first the question that caused this statement, *“Lord, will those who are being saved be few?”*

What type of question is that? It’s a question that is baiting Jesus to answer. Jesus doesn’t take the bait. Instead He points back at us – and you and I think we hear strive... (after all that is what I read. Strive...do good and you will enter heaven. This word strive makes it sound like I have to do something. It says tell me what I have to do to enter the narrow door. Do I have to be absolutely perfect or relatively better than the next guy? Is Jesus really commanding us to work hard for the sake of our salvation?

That’s not what He says when look at what He really says in the Greek. The original Greek Word is αγωνιζεσθε. Jesus uses this strong word to talk about the Baptized! What do you hear in the word: αγωνιζεσθε? I’m guessing you hear what I hear...agony...or the verbal form...to agonize? This word does not invoke positive feelings. To Agonize over something ouch! Maybe you’ve been in agony before. Maybe you’ve had to agonize over a decision before...something that wasn’t easy.

On August 11, 2009, Kayla Berg disappeared from outside a home in Wausau, WI. Ever since that day her family, has experienced great agony, struggling to go from one day to the next not knowing where she is or what has happened to her.

On August 14, 2016, a brother in ministry, Rev. J. Michael Stock was killed in a car accident and instantly sent his wife, his children, and his congregations into agony and grief.

In not quite so serious of events, but on Monday night in the qualifying races for the mens 110m hurdles, French Hurdler Wilhelm Belocian was sent home in agony in one strike you’re out rule for a false start.

Agony comes in all shapes and sizes. You and I we don’t like to suffer agony. We don’t like to struggle through it.

Have you ever agonized at getting out of a narrow space...perhaps you felt claustrophobic and started to panic? You struggle, you fight, you yell. You’re on the wrong side of the narrow space and no one can hear you. No one is there to help, so you keep fighting your way.

Jesus hear in our text continues to talk about the Christian Life—it is a struggle—an agonizing one—entering through the narrow door will be agony.

Many will try on their own and not make it. The narrow door that we are called to enter is Jesus Christ. Our culture tells us that there are many door, but there is only way, “The way, the truth, and the life” – Jesus Christ.

This life is an agonizing struggle. Being a baptized Christian is not easy. It actually puts a target on us for the devil. We are called to die daily to our sins. We are called to turn away

from the sins that are killing us and taking us down. Repentance can be pure agony. Turning from the life that we know and that sins that are comfortable to us can be quite painful.

Many of you are here every Sunday. You hear the law and the gospel. You hear blunt words of the law straight from the scriptures themselves and that creates some agonizing moments. It may even cause you to squirm in the pews. I've been there. These agonizing moments lead up to the time you actually confess your guilt and your sin. Admitting you're wrong. Admitting that you are a sinner...is agonizing. You see, we want to be seen as and called Christians, but we also want to live our lives the way that we want and oftentimes that is contradictory.

That's the agonizing struggle...living a repentant lifestyle. You see this door that is narrow is the cross of Christ. It is through that door that we enter life. It's at that door that we put our sins on Jesus.

That's the one and only way – and for many they don't fit and that's the sad reality. These people that refuse to enter when invited or try to enter on their own are the very that were warned. Luke tells us that they will say as they are knocking on the door in reply to Jesus, "*We ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets.*" Here are people that you very well may know. People who were baptized, but rejected the faith. People who passed catechism either by academic talents or by pure grace, but didn't take the teachings to heart. People who hear the Law and the Gospel preached in truth and purity and resent it. Here are people who eat and drink the Lord's Supper, but think it's just a tradition and it doesn't mean anything, and therefore eat and drink judgment on themselves.

Many people don't want to change. They don't want the agonizing struggle. They want a "Christianity" that is open and inclusive to them and their sinful lifestyle. Many people which don't want to be transformed to fit the cross-shaped door of Christ. They don't want God to change them, just to bless them and their sinful lifestyle. Rather, they want God to change.

It's not just they and them. It's also you and me. You want God to change to fit your wants and desires.

You see Jesus Christ could very well be speaking to you who firmly believed. After all, He's talking to those who ate and drank with Him. He's talking to those who were taught by Him – in their hometowns – and yes they were faithful recipients every Sunday – well maybe not every one of them – especially in the summers, oh and during the sports season – but in their hearts they believed they were good-enough Christians.

Our Lord speaks boldly about not knowing these people or where they come from, despite the fact that they are adamant about knowing Him and following Him. Pastor Zirbel in a sermon he preached on this text paraphrases Jesus words, "I don't know you. Christians don't say or do the things you're doing. I'm not saying Christians don't sin. They do sin, daily and often. Everyone born of Adam is sinful and unclean, which is precisely why I am to suffer and die and experience all our heavenly Father's justly-deserved hellish wrath for them in their place, so that they would never have to experience it themselves. Faithful Christians sin...but faithful Christians also repent. They truly struggle and agonize over their sin. They truly strive to sin no more, not because they're trying to earn their way into heaven, but because that is how they show their repentant thankfulness to our Father for the all the unmerited grace and salvation He has freely given to them in their justification. Faithful Christians don't take our Father's gift of grace and turn it into cheap grace, doing whatever they want six days out of the week, and then offering up the appearance of repentance on Sunday, all so that they can go out again with a

clean conscience and get right back in their sinful pig sty and resume their sinful ways. No. I don't recognize you. I don't know you. You may call yourself a Christian, but you're not a Christian. Depart from me, You fraudulent worker of evil."

Wow! That can rattle your cage. Think what you see and hear in our culture that passes off as faithful Christianity. Think about the "Christian" churches that call themselves faithful. Think about what you see in the mirror. Would your Savior recognize the things that you do and say on a regular basis as Christian or would he see someone that isn't living the repentant life?

So, what's the good news pastor? The good news is that you don't have to worry about if you are going to make it through the narrow door to heaven when you die. You don't have to lose sleep over that. You see as you agonize in your repentant life. Jesus already suffered the greatest agony on the cross. He did it all for you. Strive to enter the door on your own. You can't. As you agonize in your repentance, Jesus Christ takes you through the door. You see there is no if here. It is finished! Jesus Christ took your sin, He paid it all for you with His innocent life-giving blood. He has given you victory over sin, death, and the devil.

In your baptism, He clothed you with a white robe of righteousness. You didn't earn it. In the Lord's Supper HE continues to feed you. In all of those things God is bringing you through the agony of repentance and is building you up with the Gospel – the forgiveness of sins by conforming you to Him – the whole of you – words, deeds, and thoughts—so that when He calls you out of this veil of tears He will carry you through the narrow door.

That is joy and peace. Jesus Christ is your reality. The reality that He became last for you so that you may become first. Now, go and sin no more...and when you do sin, because you will, agonize in repentance and receive the forgiveness of sins that builds you up. And may this repentant life be seen in what you think, say and do, so that those around you can see the joy of the Savior in your life.

Is their pain and agony in the repentant life? Yes! There is also joy and peace in the repentant life when you receive forgiveness from Christ.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.*