



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

November 25, 2012

"A Heart Surrendered" (Gospel of Luke Series)

The Rev. Dr. Drew Hulse

(The sermon started with a video clip from *Madagascar 3*--a tiger through the burning hoop)

I know, you're wondering what in the world does a video clip of a tiger jumping through a two-inch burning hoop have to do with today's sermon. Give me a minute and hopefully it will make sense.

What an interesting Sunday on which to preach. We have just survived a roller coaster of experiences. We have gone from the celebration of Thanksgiving together, some at home with families and some of us gathered with over 425 here at church, to surviving the ravages of Black Friday. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands of who were out there stimulating the economy. Counseling will be available later.

And now, we hold our collective breath as we prepare for the onslaught of Christmas with its amazing opportunities for joy and reflection in the midst of, at times, frenzied activities. It is not often that the Sunday after Thanksgiving is not the first Sunday of advent, even though the decorating team has done an amazing job with the church. Maybe it's good that we have had our huge shopping blitz early, so during Advent we can focus on what's really important. Today is almost an opportunity to stop and reflect on where we have been and where we are headed.

Recently, we've had some challenging passages from the Gospel of Luke. Today's passage is no different. It stops me in my tracks every time I read it. SEE IF IT DOES THE SAME FOR YOU.

Luke 13:22-30 NASB:

22 And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

25 Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' 26 Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; 27 and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.'

28 In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out. 29 And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God.

30 And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."

(A photo of a Thanksgiving feast was shown on screen.) Keep this image in mind. It is one Jesus wants us to focus on.

Luke has been recording numerous interactions between Jesus and those following him. Some of the followers are sincere disciples who have committed to follow Jesus. Some of them are seekers who are looking to see if Jesus is the one for whom it has been foretold. And a third group are those who just want to test Jesus, to bring him down and prove that he is not the messiah. That group looks for opportunities to ask questions that would seek to embroil Jesus in controversy.

It is with this third group that we find Jesus today in our passage.

Karen Makishima did an amazing job last week at giving us insight into the two Kingdom parables which Luke records right before this incident. Those parables tell us God is about the work of doing big and marvelous things in His kingdom and God's kingdom is spreading like leaven. It is out of this context the next question arises.

Jesus continues to travel through the villages as he has set his course toward Jerusalem, and you can imagine how the crowds would gather and follow him.

Word gets out ahead of him that “Jesus is coming” and everyone heads out to have a look. From within one of the crowds someone hurls a question.

“Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?”

Throughout time, theologians have wrestled with theologically abstract questions that ultimately get to the nature of God, but rarely progress people in faith. “How many angels can dance on the head of a needle?” “Can God create a rock that is too heavy for God to lift?”

The question given to Jesus was one of those questions from the rabbis of the day. The rabbis would debate amongst themselves as to how many people will be saved as if there was an exact number. What’s important for us is to know is the asker was less concerned with a “number” and more concerned with a “who.” The asker, by Jesus’ response, was undoubtedly a Jew who was wanting to point out the “right” the Jews believed they had to God’s Kingdom by virtue of heritage and feeling they were the chosen people.

The question, if asked today, would probably be stated more in this way, “Do all roads lead to God?” “Is salvation for everyone or just for some?” Ultimately, without knowing it, our asker has asked the question, “Is Jesus the only way?”

In classical Jesus style, Jesus rarely answers a question directly, but rather he answers with a story that forces us to ask a question of ourselves. You can almost see him stop in his tracks and say to the questioner,

Luke 13:24-25 “Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you will seek to enter and will not be able. Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the

“A Heart Surrendered” by Pastor Drew Hulse

door, saying, ‘Lord, open up to us!’ then He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from.’”

The very first word Jesus uses is the word *strive*. The Greek word here is *agonizomai*, which was a technical word used in athletics meaning to *agonizomai*, or “engage in an athletic contest, to fight or struggle.” It is the root from which we get the word *agonize*.

We see the same use of the word in 1 Timothy 6:12: “Fight the good fight of the faith. Seize hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and about which you confessed the good confession before many witnesses.”

Jesus says you don’t just happen into or stumble through the door. In fact, he pleads with us to *strive*, to labor, to work hard at getting through that door.

One of the first questions that can arise for us is the thought, “Wait, I thought salvation was by grace, not our own efforts?”

You are exactly right, we can do nothing to save our selves. Jesus is not talking here about us earning salvation. He is talking about responding to God’s call upon our lives.

Ron, two weeks ago, did a great job of showing us that what Jesus wants from us is repentance.

Luke 13:5 “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

Remember what Ron said: “Repentance is turning and going another direction.” Our striving relates directly to our heart attitude and knowing how much we need God, as opposed to relying upon our selves or thinking we can save our selves

through something we have accomplished.

The next phrase to understand is that of the “narrow door.” Now, in our world today, fortunately we have legal requirements and the American with Disabilities Act, which means that any door needs to be at least 32” in width. (A picture of a doorway in a floorplan was shown.)

There just isn’t going to be a narrow door in today’s building codes. Your husband might put one in the back pantry, but not one on the outside. But in Biblical times, it was not unusual at all for there to be two different entrances to a house. There would be a main entrance, which was wider and often open to the street, and then there was a side entrance, a single door, a narrow gate, often on the garden side or back side, that was known to those who were familiar. This was a smaller, often times narrow door.

For the listener at the time, they knew exactly what Jesus meant by the term “narrow door.” This is not the first time Jesus has used the imagery of narrow.

Matthew 7:13-14 *“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*

When Jesus uses the word narrow, he implies a person must be very intentional in going through it. You didn’t just find yourself walking in a crowd and accidentally you’ve suddenly gone through an entrance to something. (A photo of a moose stuck in the gate was shown.)

In the case of the narrow door you have sought it out. It’s taken some work potentially to find it and to get through.

You have made a decision to go through it. You have gone through the door one person at a time, you have maybe had to set something down to get through it.

So it is with the Kingdom of God. You are not coming through the door with a group, you are coming through as an individual. And there might be stuff you are going to have to leave behind to make it through.

Why does Jesus say that the door to heaven is narrow? Because he is the one who knows it well.

John 10:7-9 "So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."

And then to make it more clear Jesus says:

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

The way is narrow because Jesus makes the exclusive claim in that he is the only way to heaven. There is none other.

Needless to say, in many arenas today this is not a popular statement. A statement of exclusivity, by its very nature, would seem to leave others out. The world doesn't want to leave anyone out. In our Post-modern world that allows someone to define truth any way they want, to make an exclusive claim is to imply others are wrong, and the worse "sin" you can commit in the post-modern world is to judge someone else, to

appear to be intolerant. In fact, potentially in the world today, Jesus' exclusive claim might be called "hate speech" by some. But that can't be further from the truth.

Let me say one thing, God doesn't want to leave anyone out. His heart is that all would be saved. Let me say that again, God doesn't want to leave anyone out. His heart is that all would be saved.

II Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

It is that heart which Jesus shares in the story. He doesn't want people to delay, to be left outside. He wants his listeners to strive, to come to him right now, because there will be sadness for those who delay. The very reason Christ came was to lay his life down so that the world could be reconciled to God.

To realize that there are going to be those who still will turn their backs is the very reason why Jesus wept over Jerusalem. It was because of their lack of faith and hearts that do not strive for God.

The world tells us there is a wide door, just be good enough, believe what you want, and in the end you will make it to heaven.

So, what do people really believe? Thanks to a study done by the Barna Group, we have a picture of what Hawaii looks like.

The State of Faith in Hawaii is research commissioned by Hawaiian Islands Ministries to discover what people actually believe in Hawaii. Conducted in February 2011, 1,008 residents were questioned as to what they believed and how they would identify their understanding of faith.

To help understand what people believe the study set some definitions or categories to give clarity.

There are five definitions we will look at and each definition has some affirmations to help us understand it. Listed is each definition and the affirmation that clarifies it:

1. Evangelical
 - Eternal Salvation by Grace
 - Bible is Accurate
 - Jesus Lived a Sinless Life
 - Satan Exists
 - Faith Very Important in your life
 - Responsibility Share Faith in Christ
 - Committed to Christ
2. Non-Evangelical Born Again
 - Accepted Jesus
 - Will go to Heaven
3. Notional Christians
 - Say they are Christians, but gives no particular affirmation
4. Other Faiths
 - i.e. Buddhist, Muslim, etc.
5. No Faith
 - Agnostic, Atheist

With those definitions, here is where people would say they fall under in regard to what they believe:

- Evangelicals 4% (Mainland – 8%)
- You can see the percentage is double on the mainland.
- Non-Evangelical/Born-Again 29% (Mainland 38%)
- Notional Christians 43% (Mainland 43%)
- Other Faith 14% (Mainland 4%)
- Agnostic or Atheist 11% (Mainland 7%)

What does the study tell us? In Hawaii, people's beliefs are all over the place, and there are many who would categorize themselves as Christian, but their understandings are very different.

Only 4% of people within Hawaii would agree with the faith affirmations of an evangelical. And even if you add in those categorized as Non-evangelical/Born Again, the total is only 33%. That means that 67% of the population of Hawaii is headed down the wide road.

The word scripture would use for this understanding, for those who chose whatever they want to believe is “folly.”

Proverb 14:12 “There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”

Here is the truth we need to know: we can never be good enough to earn our salvation.

Remember the video we started with showing the tiger going through the ring in *Madagascar 3*? We can do all of the flips and somersaults we want thinking it will earn us something, but we all fall short. And we can believe what we want, but that won't get us into heaven. Jesus pulls no punches, and the amazing thing is, He keeps nothing hidden. He has shown us the way. And it is a way of grace, a free gift from God. And it is this grace Jesus says we must strive with. Like an athlete we must wrestle with it everyday, never taking it for granted, never assuming there will be plenty of time to get to it.

This striving isn't done by our doing good deeds or assuming that we have some entitlement to it. Look again at what Jesus says to the questioner:

Luke 13:25-27 “Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, ‘Lord, open up to us!’ then He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from.’ 26 Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence,

“A Heart Surrendered” by Pastor Drew Hulse

and You taught in our streets’; 27 and He will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.’”

The people outside the door after it was closed knew the name of Jesus. They had been to events, heard Jesus teach, but their hearts had not responded. They had believed that their lineage or family ties were enough. They believed if they did the right things, said the right things, hung out around the temple, then surely they were in.

I have bad news for us and good news for us.

- Church attendance does not get us into heaven.
- Working the women's bazaar does not get us to heaven (but it does get you into Dee Dee's good graces).
- Going to youth group does not get us to heaven.
- Going on a mission trip does not get us to heaven.

We can know all the answers, we can sing all of the songs, we can check all of the boxes, but none of those will get us to heaven. The only way to be saved is to repent and surrender your heart to Christ. There is nothing we can do on our own that can earn our salvation. There is no entitlement to the Kingdom of God. But hear this, the good news is it is only by grace we are saved, through no effort of our own.

There are many potential theological questions we could wrestle with here, but the one thing I want us to hear is that above all else, what God desires from us is a heart surrendered to Him. A heart that seeks, that strives, that longs and desires to know God, is what God desires from us.

We can see God's desire all through out the scriptures, as in this passage from II Chronicles.

II Chronicles 16:9a “For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.”

A heart surrendered. It means we know it's not about what we bring to the table. It's about totally depending upon God's grace, in our helplessness, in our weakness, in our longings. Nothing from us, everything from God.

How do we know if our heart is surrendered to God? We need to be careful never to set a litmus test for people, but some of the questions we might ask ourself:

- Do you let others know you love Christ as your savior?
- Do you want others to know Christ as Savior?
- Do you have a heart for the poor?

Those questions might be a great place for us to start as we “strive” with God each day.

Where do you find yourself today? Are you the person just going along with the crowd, accepting what they say, assuming it will work out in the end, maybe even making conscience decisions to put God off for another day?

- I'll wait until I'm done with school.
- I'll wait until I'm established in my job.
- I'll wait until I'm settled with the kids.
- I'll wait until I'm retired.
- I'll wait until, oh crud, I'm dead.

We put the decision to respond to God off over and over again because there is always something.

Or are you the person whose heart longs to know God and you are seeking everyday to know Him better, to make sure you leave no stone unturned?

The latter is the person Jesus says will be reclining at the table with the Lord. That is great news. It is news that needs to be shared. Don't keep the narrow door to yourself. Tell it out loud and strong so that none will be left behind.

F. Dale Bruner, former head of the Biblical Studies Department at Whitworth University says we can have great discussions and debates about the things we speculate on concerning God, but the one thing we know for sure is that Jesus has given us marching orders. Those orders are to proclaim Christ and to go out and make disciples in the name of Jesus.

Next Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent, but we all know the season is already upon us, so let's take advantage of it. Advent points us to Jesus, his coming and His second coming.

The end of today's passage looks to the fulfillment of time when, after Christ's second coming, when we will gather around that great banqueting table.

Luke 13:29-30 "And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."

(The Thanksgiving feast picture was shown again.) As followers of Christ, we should not want anyone to be left out of the Kingdom of God. In order for that to happen, we need to know part of our calling is to be pointers.

I was at the High School State Championship Football game Friday night and I was hoping to find one of those large foam fingers you point with, but they didn't have any. We are called to point people to Jesus and to point them to the narrow door. Shout it out, whisper it to your neighbor, live it out in your families, demonstrate it in your love, "Jesus is the door!"

My prayer today for us is that we would have a heart surrendered to God and that surrendered heart would lead us to do two things: First, to strive for God with all our heart, soul and mind. It could be, as you sit here today, God has been speaking to you. You have realized you have never stepped through that narrow door, you have never given your life to Christ and now you are ready. If you would like to make that decision all you need to do is pray and ask Jesus to come into your life. Tell Him you acknowledge Him as Lord and tell Him you want to step through the narrow door. There is a prayer team who is ready to pray with you if you desire.

And the second thing I would hope your surrendered heart would lead you to do is to tell as many people about Jesus as you can. Be great pointers for Jesus. Lead as many people to the narrow door as you can. This Advent Season is a great opportunity to point people to Jesus. Take advantage of the opportunity to invite people to church so they might be able to hear the message of salvation in Christ. We have no idea when the master is going to get up and close the door, but we know there will come a time. Don't let anyone be left out. How awesome it will be to sit together around the table with our Lord.

In 2004 Cathy and I had the opportunity to take our girls to New York. While there we were able to attend the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Once the parade passes by there are hundreds of thousands of

people there and it is easy to get sucked into the flow of people. Soon you see yourself being carried away by the crowd. Don't let that happen to you with the world. Don't get caught in the crowd. Today, make the conscience decision to have a heart surrendered to God.

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