



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

August 26, 2007

Proper 16C  
Rev. Donna Barr

In the name of Jesus who stands at the door.  
Amen

I felt heartsick, in shock, confused, bewildered, and generally not happy; I had a headache just reading the Gospel for today. In case you didn't catch Jesus message let me paraphrase this again. Some very nice and respectable person just wanted to ask Jesus this question, Lord, will only a few be saved? Here's where my problem began. Jesus answers, Strive to enter through the narrow door ..and by the way, many will not be able. If that's not a downer, he continues by giving us the image of standing outside his house and knocking to get in. Instead of inviting us in, he answers us by saying; I don't know who you are, so go away!

In my preparation for today's sermon, I thought to myself, surely this is not what I should be preaching on. This message about going through a narrow door really felt like a door was slamming in my face. I prayed and I thought and I was in a bad mood.....more headaches! I've always thought of Jesus as the kind Messiah who welcomed everyone. It seems to me that he should be talking in terms of big, wide gates, not narrow doors. And who is the host that doesn't know me? The one whose father has known me since I was in my mother's womb?

As a Chaplain to those who are sick and in pain, I am to share Jesus gospel of hope of comfort of welcoming and of love. As a mother, who cared for a disabled child. Well frankly, the image of doors looks something like this to me. Too narrow for a wheelchair, too heavy to hold, too big to keep open while pushing the wheelchair in, too many steps to go around, and then there's the door that you only have to walk around the block or in the alley to the back of the building, to the door that's hidden so that the architecture or historical value of the building won't be tainted by ramps that lead to the doors. This image is so powerful for those who are disabled in body, where they know doors closed doors can be used to exclude, to diminish and to deprive. Not accessible ..not welcoming.

After these thoughts my mind takes me back to the Gospel. I wonder about the people who actually heard this message from Jesus. That picture of a narrow entryway into salvation must have made the crowd gasp. Jesus was not far from Jerusalem, so it is safe to assume that most of the people who heard him were Jews. Jesus directs his reply within their understanding. In that community, at that time, all believed they would be saved. If you and your family were Jewish and obeyed God's laws, you would be saved; that was that! I started thinking, maybe I'm not so different then those who heard this directly from Jesus. Maybe that's why I had so much trouble with this message. Maybe that's why I needed to struggle. Could it be that I think I am among the "few" – those who have given their life to Christ – go to church – do a few good deeds – smile and am welcoming – the few that are educated, have possessions and are comfy cozy? Maybe this is why I have been uncomfortable with this Gospel and maybe why I am now paying attention! I do understand that when

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something is giving me problems, it is very likely that I only need to take a look at myself for clearer insight.

O.K., I said to myself on the 20<sup>th</sup> reading.....Where is the “Good News?” Then my eyes were opened and they fell upon that dreaded word again.....“narrow.” Looking at it differently, Jesus didn’t say closed door –he said narrow; not shut but open just enough for the striving. The good part about Jesus’ door is that while it is narrow, it is open to those who are willing to follow Him, wrestling with their doubts, their questions and their own weaknesses. For it is our struggles that push open the heavy doorways to life.

In Jesus’ time every place that called itself a city had a wall around it, with gates for entering and leaving. The gates were often as wide as the road leading to the city, but within every gate was a door. That door was exactly one person wide. Each person’s spiritual struggle is his or her own. We each come to that door through our own personal experiences. The good news I have rediscovered this week, is that the image of the door is really a sign of great hope for each and all of us, and is an invitation to examine our lives for the doors, open and closed, in them. In John’s gospel Jesus says, I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. You will come in and go out, and find pasture.

Thanks be to God

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