

Proper 16C (Pentecost 13)

Text: Luke 13:22-30

Title: How Many?

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Lots of people come to Jesus asking questions.

Rarely does Jesus answer them. Very seldom does Jesus give a direct answer to a direct question. Instead, Jesus cuts through their questions to the heart of the matter.

Today someone asks Jesus a generic question. “Are there only a few people who are going to be saved?”

Now it seems like a simple, straightforward question. How many will be saved? Surely Jesus knows. So what’s the number, Jesus? What’s your best guess? How many are getting in, Jesus? Twelve? Seventy? 144,000?

The way that Jesus answers this question gets the heart of the matter.

This man assumes that he will be one of the saved ones, and he wants to know how many more folks would be a part of this elite group.

Basically, he’s saying, “How many of us are going to be saved? There are only a few of us true believers, aren’t there?”

Jesus takes this question and turns it back on the man. Jesus doesn’t talk in generalities. He doesn’t talk about numbers. He doesn’t really answer the question.

Jesus says to him, “You- you strive to enter the narrow door. You worry about yourself. You shouldn’t just assume that you’re in. Because there will be many who aren’t able to get in.”

We often think like the man who asks the question. We assume that we’re in (of course), and then we start to wonder about other folks. Who else is getting in, too?

What about those Roman Catholics, are they going to make it in? And what about my Pentecostal brother-in-law, he’s kind of nutty. And how about my neighbors who never go to church but are really nice people? And what about all the members of this congregation who never show up? Are these people going to be saved?

Stop. Stopping thinking like this.

Don’t worry about other folks. Worry about yourself. Are you in? Are you out? And how can you tell?

The folks who were left out were surprised, they were shocked to find themselves on the wrong side of the door. They expected to be on the inside with the master of the house, but instead they found themselves on the outside.

Why are they outside?

Well, just listen to their words. We ate... We drank... in our streets you taught us...

The folks on the outside make everything about themselves.

We do this, too. We talk about ourselves when it comes to salvation.

I come to church every Sunday. I come to communion. I pray and read my Bible. I give generously. I volunteer. I believe. I have faith. Surely I deserve to be saved.

When it comes to being saved, there's nothing in ourselves that we can point to as good enough to get us in. Not even the church stuff. It's possible to do all the church and still not be saved.

Because even if you show up every week, and even if you live a good life, you are still a sinner. You are still a worker of evil. There's no way that your good deeds will ever be able to balance out or make up for the bad.

Jesus says that many who seek to enter will not be able to get in. By our own strength we will never be able to make it into the kingdom.

So if eating and drinking with Jesus don't get you in, and if being around when Jesus talks doesn't get you in, how do you get in?

Jesus starts by talking about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Here are three that you know for sure are in, because Jesus says so.

How did they get in?

For Abraham, God simply called him out of the blue- Abraham, here's what I'm going to do for you. I'm going to take you from your home in Ur and bring you to Canaan and make you the father of my people. There's nothing Abraham did to earn that. It was all a free gift.

Isaac shouldn't have even existed. He was a miracle baby, born to parents who were decades past having kids in the usual way. But the Lord sent them a little laughter in the form of a baby boy, born in their old age. Isaac didn't do a thing, he was just born into God's family.

Jacob didn't deserve to be chosen by God. The blessing should have gone to his older brother, Esau. But the Lord wanted Jacob, even though he was a cheat and a liar, and so God made him the father of the twelve tribes and changed his name to Israel.

These three were in because God chose them, not because of anything in themselves. They didn't deserve it, but God chose them.

And they are not the only ones.

The prophets, too, were all unlikely choices, but they were in because God chose them and brought them in.

Jesus says that people will come from all over- east, west, north, south- for the big feast. These people will be the least and the last, not the first and the best.

If you're in, it's not because of what you've done, but because of what God has done for you.

God has chosen you. And that's what gets you in.

God has chosen you in Jesus Christ and in His death for your sins. God has chosen you in Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, Holy Gospel and Holy Supper.

These are all gifts done by God, and not things that we do to earn His favor or a spot at the table.

Do you wonder if you're saved?

Look to the cross and see the one who was left outside for you. Hear His agony and His cries. Jesus was forsaken by God for you. The door was shut on Jesus Christ so that you could come in.

Jesus is your invitation to the banquet. He deserves to go in. You deserve to come out. But instead, Jesus switches places with you. You get to come in, and Jesus stays out. Jesus endures the agony and the shame of being locked out of His Father's house on the cross for you.

You enter the door not by your own works, but by Jesus' works. You enter, clothed in His righteousness, covered by His precious blood, made pure and clean and holy by Him. You enter not because you were with Jesus, but because Jesus is in you

So instead of worrying if other folks will get in, too, or how many will be saved, go and tell them about Jesus, bring Jesus to them, so that they are included and brought in- from the east and the west and the north and the south. Don't just ask Jesus about them, do something!

Point them to the cross, to Jesus Christ, and His death for them. Point them to the one who was shut out so that we could come in. Point them to the places where they receive Jesus- altar, pulpit and font.

So how many will be saved? Jesus knows. Jesus is not telling. And that's a good thing.