

CROSSWALK: The Narrow Door  
Luke 13:22-30  
February 28, 2010

How many of you have been keeping up with the Olympics the last two weeks? It's always an inspiring oasis in time for us to see men and women who have trained for years rise to the ultimate competition on the world stage.

In addition to the games themselves, whatever television station is broadcasting them always weaves in human interest stories about the individual athletes as well as the city in which the event is being held.

Vancouver and British Columbia have looked resplendent with the snowcapped mountains of the Canadian Rockies as the backdrop. But yesterday, it was an urban landscape experience that was highlighted during a break between events. The reporter told about a zipline that was attached atop a skyscraper on one side of town, and fastened on the other side of town to a landing spot on the street. A zipline is a cable to which is attached a harness that people wear and slide down from one end of the cable to another. The camera caught pictures of people zipping overhead of the streets, sometimes feet dangling above building tops, sometimes maneuvering to travel upside down with their heads toward the ground.

The crazy thing is that most of those people waited in line for an average of 9 hours. That's right—9 hours! They spent 9 hours of their lives waiting in line for a 30 second ride across town.

But if you think that's bad, just consider the parents who are sitting outside today at a private school in Arlington waiting to enroll their kids for next year's school term. Most of them have been camping out, waiting in line since Thursday.

Now we all know that standing in line is part of the deal. One researcher who did a study on how we spend our time said that the average person, by the time we die, will have spent 5 years waiting in line.

I suppose we all know the frustration and the reality that many times we must wait in line to get to our destination, our goal. But the frustration is compounded when we finally make it to the entrance, to the turnstile, to the narrow door, only to be turned away.

Just imagine waiting in line to get into Jerry World and being turned away at the turnstile because our ticket is for another game, another night.

Just imagine waiting in line to get into a club, only to be turned away because we're not one of the beautiful people. We may try and say we know the band personally, but it does no good.

When it comes to our faith walk, we don't like to think of Jesus turning anyone away, and yet this morning's text challenges us with a word that is designed to make the faithful who are waiting for easy admittance into his realm be aware that it is not quite that easy.

Our scripture this morning joins us to Jesus as he and his disciples were walking on their journey toward Jerusalem, walking toward the cross. As you heard \_\_\_\_\_ read this morning, they were passing through a small village when a bystander asked him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?"

Did you notice that Jesus does not answer the question with a number, or even a hint of an amount? Although I'm sure Jesus would have been one of those teachers who would have said before class—"no question is a stupid question," he does let us know through his response that "how many" is not the issue. The issue for Jesus is simply: "How" How will you make your way into the heavenly realm of God?

In this morning's text, Jesus gives us a few hints into that process, and what we should expect on our Cross-walk with him.

First, we hear Jesus say, "Strive to enter by the narrow door." In this scripture, as in others, Jesus gives us a clue that it is not going to be easy access into the realm of God. The narrow door image—much like the "eye of the needle"

reference he uses elsewhere—reminds us that though it is not impossible to get in to God’s presence, the narrow door means that each one of us individually will be considered for admittance. We can’t just go in and be accepted because we’re part of a crowd. A narrow door means that we have to go in single file, one by one. This is how we are to be judged.

But not only that, we have to strive to get through the narrow door. As I read this text, I kept seeing the picture of the Garrett family vacation to Fredricksburg, Tx last year—a trip they had memorialized on their New Year’s greeting to friends—[and now, to us] (1<sup>st</sup> service).

In the picture, you see Howard, Logan and Judy slipping through a narrow rock formation in a cave far beneath our Texas soil. In one section of the cave, the only way they could go forward was by turning sideways, pushing themselves around a big rock in their path, bending their bodies low to avoid the overhanging rock ceiling above their heads.

In order to get where they wanted to go, they had to work hard, to strive, as Jesus would say. They had to physically exert themselves to get where they wanted to go.

When I was in high school at Bryan Adams, I sat next to a girl in my Spanish class who always came to class yawning. It was first period, so we probably all came dragging in early in the morning, but our teacher was Mr. Baldor, and he was young and quite engaging—enough to keep me awake in the mornings.

One day, when she was copiously yawning, I asked her why she was so tired and she shared with me that she was up every morning at 5 am in order to get to the ice rink for practice. She was trying to make the Olympic figure skating team, and she had to practice both before and after school every day.

Then came the day she didn’t come to class. She was absent for a whole week before I asked Mr. Baldor about her. He told me that she and her parents had

moved to Colorado Springs to train for the Olympics at their official training site.

That winter, I watched for my friend to see if she made the team. I never saw her, and I was disappointed—probably much less than she. I know how hard she worked, and how much her family sacrificed to make that team.

I wonder about her—Did she give up at some point? Or did she compete nationally, and just didn't make the final cut for the Olympics, as hundreds of young people do each year? Did she ever regret those early morning and late afternoon practices? Or did they make her stronger in all aspects of her life because she learned to strive for excellence?

That's the focus, the energy, that Jesus calls us to make when we agree to follow his way. The cross-walk of Jesus is not a Sunday afternoon stroll around the lake—it is a limit-pushing, full-bodied commitment that requires every bit of our strength and focus that each of us individually must take, and for which each of us will be judged when that day comes. So Jesus' first word on our cross-walk is strive.

The second thing Jesus explains about his cross-walk is we shouldn't assume that we'll make it in just because of who we know or what we say. What matters is what we do—the *kinds of things* we do. Jesus says in verses 25-27: "A lot of you are going to assume that you'll sit down to God's salvation banquet just because you've been hanging around the neighborhood all your lives. Well, one day you're going to be banging on the door, wanting to get in, but you'll find the door locked and the Master saying, 'Sorry, you're not on my guest list.' <sup>26-27</sup>"You'll protest, 'But we've known you all our lives!' only to be interrupted with his abrupt, 'Your kind of knowing can hardly be called knowing. You don't know the first thing about me.'"

Now I wish I could tell you that Jesus was simply addressing the people of his time—those Pharisees and Sadducees who felt they had a free ride to God's good graces because of their standing in the temple. I wish I could tell you that Jesus was solely addressing those who followed him from a distance, who

had shared in the miracle of the feeding of the 4000, who knew him as the celebrity who came to town and did miracles in their midst.

But Jesus' words are as pointedly relevant to us today. As much as I hate to say this, Jesus would say that just because you know the preacher well enough to call her by name and have her over for dinner, just because you come to church on Sunday morning and have communion with regularity, just because you've been baptized and can call yourself a Christian—that doesn't automatically buy you a "get in free" card to the realm of God.

There's more to making the Cross-walk with Jesus than mere lip-service, or by just saying you know him. It's how you live your life, your whole walk on earth, that makes the difference. Your baptism was a covenant with God, promising to live like Christ, working to bring the realm of God into reality on earth. Truly knowing Jesus is living like Jesus on earth, working to bring peace in the midst of violence; justice in the face of injustice.

So the second word of this text is a warning to each of us: Don't assume you've got an easy in just because you go around saying you're a Christian. You've got to live it to get your ticket.

The third word Jesus offers is not only should you not assume that you've made it in—don't assume that others won't make it. He tells the road-side classroom in our text this morning that the door to salvation will not just be opened to the chosen people—but will be accessible to all those who live their lives in accordance to his way—people from the north and the south, the east and the west—in other words—people we wouldn't expect to get in—there they'll be, sitting at the banquet table with our God.

He concludes the text with this enigmatic line, "The last shall be first, and the first, last." Of all the things he said that sharply challenges 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans, that's got to be the humdinger. We are so into being first in all things—just listen to the nightly report from the Olympics about how many medals we have in comparison to other nations. Just look at how we view

gold medal winners as opposed to silver and bronze, much less those who don't even medal at all.

For Jesus, there's no medal waiting at the end of his road—when we walk with him there's only a cross waiting at the end of the road—a symbol of failure; a symbol of defeat; a symbol of death.

And yet, because of Jesus, that cross becomes the most precious symbol of life and victory we could ever attain. When we live our lives sacrificially, striving for love in the face of hate, sharing power with the powerless, we find ourselves in the line that moves freely through a narrow door that opens into the expansive life in Christ.

When the time comes for us to join the queue for the narrow door, will we have striven hard doing Christ's work on behalf of those deemed the "least of these" in our world? Will we have understood that the ticket for entrance is not because of who we know and what group we belong to—even if we say we're Christian? And will we have refrained from judging who else is eligible to be admitted into the presence of God?

That's our work for our Cross walk this week—not an easy task, to say the least.