

HOMILY SUNDAY 21-C  
“Enter By The Narrow Door”

(Isaiah 66:18-21; Psalm 117; Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13; Lk 13:22-30)

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What is the best way to experience the Kingdom of God right here, right now?

Live in the Kingdom, and you will be ready for the Kingdom.

The gospel today has Jesus saying some harsh sounding statements. What are we to make of them? Commentators offer a variety of responses: “Be as Christ-like as possible;” “Be committed and live your commitments;” “Be hospitable to those on the road,” and “Do not presume anything.” Ultimately, in my opinion, they all boil down to the terse statement above – live in the Kingdom, and you will be ready for the Kingdom.

The New Interpreter’s Bible advises us not to presume anything. Who will enter and who will not? This question leads to the heart of the mystery of election and grace, free will and determinism. Perhaps it is best to allow Jesus’ sayings to retain their mystery and ambiguity. Two points remain clear, however: Jesus admonishes his followers to strive to enter by the narrow door, and he warns them that in the end there will be many surprising reversals. Many who think they will enter will not, and others (who are presumed to be excluded from God’s fellowship) will take their place. Strive, therefore, as one who dares not presume on God’s grace. Strive as though admission to the kingdom depended entirely on your own doing, but know that ultimately it depends on God’ grace.

For Corbin Eddy, the proper approach is to be hospitable towards strangers who come to us however, tentatively throughout the year, rather than forcing them to fit into our pre-set categories and policies. We do not always know “where they are coming from” and need the discipline and asceticism to make space for them to be at home enough to share that with us. We need to get to know them first. The question “where are you coming from” poses a number of other questions such as: Are you on a road? Do you know what road you are on and why you are on it? In other words, are you on a healing journey, living in a dynamic and authentic way? Is your journeying real? Is there sincerity and truth in your journeying?

Luke consistently suggests that those of us who are “saved” and secure in our knowledge of what that is all about may not even be dealing with these essential issues ourselves. We may either be standing still or coming from the wrong place. The sense that others will come from the four directions, that the last will be first and the first last, turns upside down any tendency in organized religion to deify the size and shape of any particular door. The issue in hospitality for us who are at home here is less the size and shape of our door than inquiring about where our neighbours are coming from, and washing their feet and anointing their heads.

For John O’Shea, Jesus rejects the speculation about numbers and focuses on the question of

struggle. He is telling him: “Forget the question of how many and put your mind and heart into the disciplined work of striving to enter.” It is not “who you know” but “who you are” that matters in this struggle. The Lord’s remarks connected “who you know” and “who you are” in a dynamic process of spiritual recognition. The Lord only recognises his own. He knows you if you are like him. This likeness is not on the level of shared ethnicity. The Lord knows those who come from the same spiritual place as he comes from. “I do not know where you come from” means there is no spiritual link between the people wanting to be admitted and the one who can open the door. Jesus comes from a heart set on God that cooperates with the divine Spirit to love all people. This is the room where the banquet is being held, and the door to this room is narrow. Those who genuinely enter this struggle will learn the great lesson of grace – what begins in striving is accomplished by surrender. Those who are “first” have found in their hearts what Jesus knew in his heart – divine love makes brothers and sisters of us all. When we know this, the Lord knows us; and the narrow door becomes the widest of gates.

To my mind, anyone who apologizes or is able to ask for forgiveness is humble and the kingdom grows in that person. I think of Rita Favel who after much personal struggle was able to accept the loss of a job to co-worker ten years her junior. With much prayer, reflection on that person’s credentials, and self-talk that it was not because she was Aboriginal, she was finally able to phone the person, congratulate her and promise her cooperation. That to me is a kingdom stance, an entering through the narrow door.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is truly a humble meal. Jesus did not cling to his equality with God, but humbled himself, became one of us, and allowed God to “discipline” him for our sake, to the point of accepting death, death on the cross. Our sharing in this meal is both a prayer that we might be able to be humble like him, and a commitment to follow him in that humble way of life, of loving, self-giving service to others.

So, pray for humble faith to live in the Kingdom, as the best way to be ready for the Kingdom.