

August 21, 2022
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 13:22-30

Jesus passed through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?”

He answered them, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.”

“After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, ‘Lord, open the door for us.’ He will say to you in reply, ‘I do not know where you are from.’ And you will say, ‘We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets,’ then he will say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers! “And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out. And people will come from the east and west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God. For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

Background:

Last week the gospel text presented an atypical image of Jesus. In the first verse of that gospel Jesus said that he came “to set the earth on fire (Luke 12:49).” The text went on to describe the division among families that the Christian community had already begun to experience because of their acceptance of Jesus’ teachings and values. After that text, Luke then goes on to describe Jesus exhorting the crowd, who know how to interpret the signs of the weather, but not the signs of their own situations, where they could judge for themselves what is right, and if only they did they could avoid being taken into court by their neighbor. The first verses of chapter 13 describe Jesus addressing the crowds. First he talks about those who look upon others as more sinful because of some tragedy that happens to them. Next, Luke recounts Jesus telling three parables. The first uses a barren fig tree to reveal the compassionate patience of God. The second is of a mustard seed that speaks of God’s ability to accomplish greatness with the smallest of seeds. The third focuses on yeast that although undetectable works into the whole measure of dough. Following those three parables the mood in Luke’s gospel shifts, as Jesus continues on his journey toward Jerusalem and into the text that is the gospel for this Sunday.

The first verse of this gospel states simply that Jesus had “passed through towns and villages... making his way to Jerusalem” (Luke 13:22). The towns and villages are not named; neither is the person who approaches Jesus. Their names would be distractions away from the question that is being asked. But in a familiar fashion, Jesus redirects the focus, shifting from a curiosity question of how many to a more significant question of who will find themselves within the kingdom of God. At the heart of the question is a belief commonly held by the Judeans of Jesus’ day: as people of Israel they were part of God’s chosen people, and they assumed that on that merit alone they would be part of God’s final realm. The Pharisees, however, held that only a remnant few would be included in the final reign of God.

Much of the life and culture of Jesus’ day was concerned with knowing who belonged within an individual’s in-group, and thus whom one owed allegiance to. Those outside that group were viewed as potential threats to the well-being of one’s primary group. One’s family was part of this in-group by the fact that one shared blood. The sharing of other bodily fluids (blood, saliva, semen, or milk) also created a bond between people. The most obvious example would be marriage partners. Another were those who shared the same wet nurse. In this culture they were looked upon as brother or sister and were not permitted to marry.

Another way of establishing a bond between people was through eating together. Throughout both the Christian and Hebrew scriptures, the significance of who is present at the table and at banquets is often a topic of discussion and a symbol used for instruction. Some examples that might come to mind are:

- the Passover,

- Abraham's meal with the two strangers,
- Jesus dining with Zacchaeus, the tax collector,
- Jesus' meals with the disciples after the resurrection, and
- Peter's eating with the gentile converts who were not circumcised, and then refusing to eat with them after he received criticism for eating with non-Jewish Christians. (This becomes very important to Paul and to the whole Christian community.)

The parable Jesus tells in this text challenges those who think they know who will be included. Those who believe that they should be invited into the house (heavenly banquet) believe that they have been made part of Jesus' inner circle because they have shared meals together. But twice in the parable the master says to those outside the house, "I do not know where you come from." The parable also indicates that among those who are presumed not to be part of the household, there are some who will be welcomed. The parable concludes, "And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God (Luke 13:29)." This is a familiar way of saying that people from all nations and ways of life will be part of the final age. It is important to note that some among those who believe they are part of the household will find themselves outside the door, and some who might be presumed to not be included will find welcome. The emphasis would seem to be on how one is striving to enter through the narrow gate, and not on membership in a particular group. The narrow gate of the city was the gate through which only a single person could enter. For the Christians for whom Luke is writing, that narrow gate is a person, Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions:

1. Where do you see people being treated as insiders or outsiders?
2. Do you have experiences of being treated both as an insider and as an outsider?
3. Have you ever had the experience of being welcomed as an insider into a group even though you were an outsider?
4. Do you know people who are especially good at making people feel like they are insiders?
5. What do you hear underlying the question, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" How would you like to respond to that person?
6. Toward the very end of the gospel Jesus tells the crowd, "And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God." What do you hear Jesus saying to those who are listening to him that day?
7. Can you take some time now to talk with God about what you are feeling as you hear Jesus talk about those who are included in the final reign of God, or about your own concern for who might be part of God's reign, or your own fears and hopes about being part of the final reign of God?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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Excerpts from the readings for August 21, 2022, the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thus says the Lord: I know their works and their thoughts,
and I come to gather nations of every language; they shall come and see my glory.
I will set a sign among them; from them I will send fugitives to the nations:
to Tarshish, Put and Lud, Mosoch, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands
that have never heard of my fame, or seen my glory;
and they shall proclaim my glory among the nations.
They shall bring all your brothers and sisters from all the nations as an offering to the Lord,
on horses and in chariots, in carts, upon mules and dromedaries, to Jerusalem, my holy mountain,
says the Lord, just as the Israelites bring their offering to the house of the Lord in clean vessels.
Some of these I will take as priests and Levites, says the Lord.

Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.
Praise the Lord all you nations; glorify him, all you peoples!
For steadfast is his kindness toward us, and the fidelity of the Lord endures forever.

Brothers and sisters, You have forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as children:
"My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by him;
for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges."
Endure your trials as "discipline"; God treats you as sons.
For what "son" is there whom his father does not discipline?
At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain,
yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.
So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees.
Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be disjointed but healed.

Jesus passed through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem.
Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?"
He answered them, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate,
for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.
After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking
and saying, 'Lord, open the door for us.' He will say to you in reply, 'I do not know where you are from.
And you will say, 'We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.'
Then he will say to you, 'I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!'
And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out.
And people will come from the east and the west
and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God.
For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

Excerpts from Isaiah 66:18-21; Psalm 117:1-2; Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13; and Luke 13:22-30

From Joe:

Friends,

The gospel from Luke details Jesus' response when he is asked, "Will only a few be saved?" His reply does not suggest a simple yes or a no. Instead it suggests that every person could be saved, but not all will be. It suggests that there is certainly opportunity to be saved, for all people everywhere, but also that it is not easy, that the opportunity will not always be there, and that some who think they should be included will be shut out. "Strive to enter through the narrow gate," Jesus says. "Many will not be strong enough. The master will

say, 'Depart from me, all you evildoers; I do not know you.' Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

The other readings also have references to God's kingdom being available to anyone, from anywhere, when they remain strong in God. In the first reading from Isaiah, thus says the Lord: "I know their works and their thoughts, and I come to gather your brothers and sisters from all the nations to the house of the Lord. Some of these I shall take as priests and Levites." Psalm 117 proclaims, "Praise the Lord, all you nations, for steadfast is his kindness, and the fidelity of the Lord endures forever. In the second reading, from the letter to the Hebrews, they and we are instructed, "Do not disdain the discipline of the Lord. Whom the Lord loves, he disciplines. At the time, discipline seems a cause not for joy, but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths, that what is lame may be healed."