

Hebrews 12:18-24 (Luke 13:22-24)

Why doesn't anyone actually work on "Labor" Day? Why do we park our car on a driveway and drive it on a parkway? Some questions are better left unanswered. One such question was asked of Jesus in Luke 13: "Are only a few people going to be saved?" The man who asked the question may have been quite sincere, or more likely, he may have had a very selfish motivation in asking it. He may have been thinking, "Are only a few others, besides me, being saved? I know I've got a lock on heaven, and there surely can't be too many others out there like me, right?"

It may appear to us that Jesus doesn't answer his question at all—and in a way we would be correct. He doesn't come out with a "Yes" or "No" answer. But He does say this in response: "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to." Jesus says essentially the same thing in His Sermon on the Mount: "Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is broad which leads to destruction and many are those who enter by it; for the gate is small and the way is narrow which leads to life and few are those who find it." So in a round-a-bout way Jesus does give an answer, and the answer is, "Yes, few will be saved; few will find the narrow door, but many will enter the wide door into hell."

It might be interesting to pose a similar question to people today: "How many will be saved?" What responses do you think we would get? Based upon data from polls taken using questions like this, we know that the vast majority of people answer, "More will be saved than will be lost." The latest poll I saw showed that 90% of Americans believe they will end up in heaven. And when asked "Why?" the answer most given is, "Because I'm basically a good person." And they think that most others are also pretty decent people deep down; only a few are downright despicable—so they reason in their minds, contrary to what Jesus says, that the gate into heaven is wide and most will enter by it, and the gate into hell is narrow and few are those who will enter through it. And it doesn't help that they hear all sorts of glowing eulogies at funerals for their friends and neighbors...hearing such eulogies you'd be tempted to think, "It's a wonder anyone goes to hell!"

But you and I know that the world has its own logic; only Jesus speaks the truth. "Few," He says, "will be saved. That gate and way is small and narrow." Even church-going people who come up to the Lord's Table and sit in the pew to listen should take care to walk in the narrow way that leads to life. He says in Luke 13, "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' But He will reply, 'I don't know you... Away from Me!'" Outward actions mean nothing without faith and trust in the heart.

So why will only few be saved? Our Epistle lesson gives us the answer: "You have not come to a mountain that is burning with fire, to darkness, gloom, and storm; but you have come to Mt. Zion." Two mountains, here in Hebrews 12, are contrasted—Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion. Mt. Sinai is where God first led His people when they left Egypt. Moses went up this mountain to receive from God the Ten Commandments. Do you recall what a frightening event that was? The mountain was full of fire and smoke as God came down to rest upon it. His trumpet blast was nearly unbearable for the people to hear. The mountain quaked along with all the land around it. And God told the people, "No one is to touch the mountain; if anyone touches it he will die!"

The other mountain in Hebrews 12 is Mt. Zion. Mt. Zion is the Church. It also is where God comes down; not in fear, terror, and death, but in grace and mercy. On Mt. Zion there is forgiveness, life, and salvation. There is the Gospel, the blood of Jesus, righteousness, and the angels of God, and the saints—those in heaven and on earth. Now, which mountain do you want to climb! Mt. Sinai or Mt. Zion? And here we have the answer to all of our questions...Why will few be saved...and why will most people perish? Most people will perish in hell because they're trying to climb Mt. Sinai. They're trying to reach God and life in heaven by doing their best to keep the Law.

But if you and I think that living a decent life will save us from hell, then we don't understand Mt. Sinai at all, for Mt. Sinai is full of fear and trembling. No man could touch Mt. Sinai and live, and no one today can climb that mountain to eternal life. That's why most people will perish—they're trying to climb the wrong mountain; they're trying to gain life in heaven by their good behavior—by observing the laws which were given on Mt. Sinai.

The only way to heaven is by way of Mt. Zion. For here is Christ and forgiveness and righteousness. On Mt. Zion we see those enrolled in heaven. On Mt. Zion is the blood of God's Lamb sprinkled. Mt. Sinai means death; Mt. Zion is life, for where Christ is, there is forgiveness and life. And it's not that we climb up Mt. Zion, but we "come to" Mt. Zion. This is where God comes to meet you. This is where you gain access to His gifts; for Mt. Zion is where God climbs down to bless you with all the treasures of heaven. No matter why you come to God's House, you can be sure that He is here to bless you with His heavenly gifts in Christ Jesus. They are for you.

The only mountain that saves us is Mt. Zion. Now perhaps you are wondering why our text makes no mention of Mt. Calvary. For there are those who claim to love Mt. Calvary but care nothing for Mt. Zion. "I believe in Jesus," they claim, but rarely, if ever, enter through the door of God's House. But they are greatly mistaken. For you and I will not find Mt. Calvary apart from Mt. Zion. Mt. Zion, says our text, is where Jesus' blood is sprinkled. His cross is found in His Church. In Baptism, in the preached Gospel, in His Supper—this is where we see the cross of Calvary; where the cross comes to us—never apart from, but always in Mt. Zion.

Friend, do not fear the terror and death of Mt. Sinai. You are baptized. You are sprinkled with the blood of Christ. You are forgiven—God's dear saint, not because you live on Mt. Sinai, but because Christ has brought you to His mountain—His Church—the place where His grace is poured out for you. No matter how much you have sinned; no matter how terrible your sins, His grace and mercy is here for you. Will few be saved? Yes, this is true. The gate into life is narrow and few will find it. But do not fear. Trust in Jesus who died for you and who is here in His Mt. Zion to give you faith, hope, and eternal life. Do not focus on the "few." Focus on Christ for you. He is the narrow "Door;" the Way, the Truth, and the Life—and He is here with His gift of life for you. Amen.