**PP#1:** *Collage of door images from previous slideshow: Garden of Eden, Ark, Passover, Temple.*

Thresholds: The Story of the Bible, the Story of Salvation. We have been following thresholds and doorways in the Bible’s grand story of salvation. At Eden, when Adam and Eve were expelled because of their defiance to God, God placed cherubim with flaming swords to block the way to the Tree of Life, and humanity lost the paradise God intended for us. When sin spread and corrupted the entire world beyond restoration, and God sent a flood to wash the infection of sin away, God closed the door of the ark in order to protect the fledgling light still barely flickering. When God came to free the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, God told them to spread the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts as a witness that they choose to put their trust in Him. God then takes His chosen people and leads them into the desert, to Mt. Sinai, where God give them laws, a system of animal sacrifice, and instructions for how to construct a tabernacle so His presence can be with them...but veiled, separated, and insulated.

**PP#2:** Thresholds: The Gate of Life

**You have made known to me the path of life;**

**You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand. ~Psalm 16:11**

 Thresholds. The Gate of Life. Psalm 16:11. You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand.

 Our threshold this week is found in Jesus’ sermon on the mount in Matthew 7 verses 13 & 14; a familiar yet uncomfortable passage of scripture.

**PP#3: Matthew 7:13-14**

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

Now these two verses are uncomfortable not because they are difficult to understand, no, quite the opposite, we understand all too clearly what Jesus is trying to tell us. If we are honest, however, we may admit we would have preferred He skipped this part of His sermon. We prefer easy and wide. Narrow is almost never a good thing, narrow minded, narrow thinking, narrow perspective; we would not want it as an adjective describing us unless perhaps it described our hips.

In our current culture this passage seems to scream exclusivity and separation with secret knowledge for a privileged few. And there are only two choices and the results are not the same. It goes against the mantra that all roads lead to God and heaven. This passage also stands in contrast to the sales pitch we as Christians are sometimes guilty of using to get people to come to church. We tend to share with others all the good things and the promises. But it may seem like bait and switch when they find out about carrying a cross, denying themselves and walking a narrow road. Yet these words come from our Savior Himself so we must take them seriously as He intended them.

Since Pastor stuck me with, I mean invited me to preach today, let’s see if the Holy Spirit can help us reframe our aversion to these words and be inspired to get on or stay on this path that leads to life.

Jesus says to “Enter by the narrow gate”. Okay, what does that mean for us? Jesus, in John 10, says that He is the gate. We come to faith through Jesus, and only Jesus. Jesus Himself is the Threshold of salvation. His death and resurrection make possible our repentance and forgiveness. The cross is the gateway to the path of life and we must enter through it. So how do we get through the gate? Jesus tells us in the passage just before ours.

**PP #4: Matthew 7:7-8**

 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

 Simple, really. Just ask Him and He will open the gate and let you in. No special code words, no secret knock, no exclusive identity or membership required. Everyone may enter, but sadly not everyone will choose the narrow gate.

 Before entering any gate, we must consider where it leads. While discussing the sermon earlier this week, Pastor relayed a story from our trip to Hawaii last summer.

**PP #5: Diamond Head pics**

He and the kids wanted to tackle the climb to Diamond Head. I would rather have a root canal, but back to the story. He said that as they were about to head up a particularly steep section of the path he noticed another path off to the side. It was wide and paved and seemed much smoother with a more level incline. He wondered why they were on the much harder path. Once he reached the top, he realized that other path did not go to the top of the crater at all, but some other destination. So there were two paths, but only one took him where he wanted to go. That is what Jesus is trying to say in this passage.

**PP #6: Matthew 7:13-14**

 “For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

 Jesus only presents two options. You are either on the right path or the wrong one. We get to choose the path, but the outcome of our choice is already decided. We can get off the wrong path at any time, thankfully, and join the one that leads to life, but we must be aware, we can get off the right path, too, and start walking the wrong way. It is one or the other with no middle ground,

But His point here is not to be fearful of which path we are on but to show us that there are only two choices. This whole section of the sermon on the mount is about contrasts: good and evil, wise and foolish builders, wide and narrow gates. He is trying to distinguish His way of life from that of the world and that we must make a choice to follow or not. The way Jesus frames it makes it pretty obvious which is the better choice ultimately even if it seems more difficult at first.

Matthew Henry, the 17th Century Welshman, had this to say in his commentary on this section:

**PP #7: Matthew Henry Quote**

The great concern and duty of every one of us, in consideration of all this; Enter ye in at the strait [or narrow] gate. The matter is fairly stated; life and death, good and evil, are set before us; both the ways, and both the ends: now let the matter be taken entire, and considered impartially, and then choose you this day which you will walk in; nay, the matter determines itself, and will not admit of a debate. [Basically, he is saying, it is obvious which choice to make, it’s a no brainer. He continues:] No man, in his wits, would choose to go to the gallows, because it is a smooth, pleasant way to it, nor refuse the offer of a palace and a throne, because it is a rough, dirty way to it; yet such absurdities as these are men guilty of, in the concerns of their souls. Delay not, therefore; deliberate not any longer, but enter ye in at the strait gate; knock at it by sincere and constant prayers and endeavors, and it shall be opened;

Hopefully, Jesus, the two Matthews and I have convinced you of which gate to enter, next we must discuss the path beyond.

**PP #8: Narrow Road image**

 Yes, Jesus informs us right up front that the road is narrow and hard and that makes us have second thoughts shortly after coming through the gate. We look around and notice we are alone and separated from the comfort of the crowd, we see the uphill climb ahead, we feel ill equipped for the journey, we start to realize what we have to give up in order to walk this path. We focus on our discomfort, on ourselves and what the folks on the other path get to do and have. We forget where our path is leading and Who is leading us on it and either stop walking or leave the path altogether. We need a new approach; a way to reframe our understanding.

**PP #9 Reframing the Narrow Road**

 Jesus tells us very clearly this path leads to life. Life abundant and eternal, that is our destination. I came to Christ as a teenager because I didn’t know if the path I was on would land me in heaven and I wanted to know for sure. So I began my relationship with Christ with the end in mind. We must remember always where we are headed, this is not our home, we are on a journey to get back the paradise that was lost in Eden. So, we should not be bummed out that the path is narrow and hard, we should be filled with joy that there is a path at all and that it leads to someplace unimaginably awesome! The narrow road is actually a gift, not a burden. Whatever sacrifice we make, whatever the cost, it will be worth it in the end!

 We do not walk this path alone. We are being led by the Holy Spirit on a path that many others before us have walked. And they are cheering us on. God has given us His Word as a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. And we are not the only ones even when it feels like it. There are always other believers to help us and for us likewise to encourage. We have work to do, also, to help others choose the narrow way. Staying on the path requires prayer, scripture study, worship and fellowship. The same old story – discipleship. There is no substitute or shortcut if you want to stay on the path that leads to life.

 And when we are tempted to look around at those on the other path, we must remember to keep our focus on Christ for He will give us the strength to continue. One of the instructors in Rebekah’s EMT class has an interesting way of regaining the students’ attention. He yells out, “EYES!” and he has trained them to respond with “FRONT!” Perhaps the Holy Spirit can use this to call us back to focus, to receive necessary correction and instruction and to keep our eyes from wandering over to the grass that appears greener.

**PP #10 Narrow path drawing**

 The narrow road is a threshold of salvation because it is the only way back to the Father, back to Paradise to regain that which was lost. The cross is the entrance gate, the path, albeit narrow and difficult, is a gift, it is where we are led by the Spirit, where we experience abundant life and whose destination is eternal life with our God.

**PP #11 Psalm 16**

 The Psalmist encourages us with this prayer from chapter 16. Let’s read it out loud together.

“You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand.

Beloved, choose this very day, choose the Jesus way, choose the way that leads to life! Amen.

BENEDICTION

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen and Go in Peace ON THE NARROW WAY!