



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for August 9, 2020**  
**“From the Mount: Bearing Good Fruit”**  
**Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: Matthew 7:13-23**

## **A Rousing Conclusion**

Our present sermon series focusing on the Sermon on the Mount is drawing to a close. Just like they'll say at the upcoming Kentucky Derby, "*Down the stretch they come.*" I hope you have been as challenged as I have been as we've considered what it means to be a citizen of God's Kingdom.

For a lot of reasons I hate to see us move on. I have heard that same thing from others. There's nothing quite like digging in on the teachings of Jesus. I encourage you to continue to do just that.

Every good sermon points to a rousing conclusion, a conclusion that stirs the soul, offers plenty to think about, and a challenge to be different. Jesus provides that in his Sermon on the Mount. As Jesus draws things to a close he not only gives us a lot to think about, but challenges us to no end.

So then let's hear from Matthew 7:13-23.

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

## **One Crossroad after Another**

The road of life is filled with one crossroads after another. That's simply a part of the journey. Robert Frost in his poem *The Road Not Taken* writes, “*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.*”

Life gives us plenty of opportunities to go one way or the other. Life is fraught with all sorts of decisions and those decisions go a long way toward determining the course of our lives.

Author and pastor, James Merritt states that “*decision determines direction and direction determines destiny.*”

Contrary to popular thought, all roads don't lead to God. As with any journey we need to be careful about the decisions we make and the directions we take.

### **Enter the Narrow Gate**

In wrapping up his Sermon on the Mount Jesus challenges us about the direction of our lives when he talks about us *"entering the narrow gate."* He contrasts that by saying, *"Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction."*

The gate that is wide is the one chosen by far too many. It has great appeal. It has an alluring quality to it. It invites us to come on in. It is essentially the way of the world. You and I know all too well that the things of this world have their appeal. They have a way of drawing us in. They are only able to satisfy to a certain extent.

Jesus contrasts that by talking about a gate of a different sort. He talks about the narrow gate, a gate that even though relatively few chose to walk through, when they do there is the hope and promise of new life. For those on the outside looking in, the way of *"the straight and narrow"* looks right restrictive, particularly in light of all the world offers. Yet for those though who have experienced the joys of living in Christ the way doesn't feel all that restrictive. Life in Christ is life indeed.

Those given over to Jesus experience a freedom unlike any other. The world no longer has sway. The weight of sin is no longer the same. In effect Jesus is saying to us, *"Hold on to my teachings and live them out, and you will enjoy my strength. You will live life as God always intended you to live it."*

Eugene Peterson puts things this way in the paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*, *"Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way of life to God is vigorous and requires total attention."*

In talking about the narrow gate Jesus wants us:

- To stay attentive to the things of God.
- To be aware that not everything we hear is gospel.
- To be careful about undue influences constantly trying to draw us away from God.

A fellow who spent his life on the road going from town to town was once asked how he decided which way to go when he came to a fork in the road. His answer was simple and to the point, *"I simply put my back to the wind."*

Christ wants us to do otherwise. He wants us to keep our gaze upon him and let him be our guide. *"Enter the narrow gate,"* says Jesus, and upon heeding his invitation we will find him there to guide us in every way.

### **Watch Out for False Prophets**

Jesus concludes his discussion about the narrow gate and launches into a discussion about false prophets. He says we need to lookout for them. We need to be careful about those we listen to.

Jesus asserts that when it comes to those who attempt to speak into our lives, we need to consider the fruit they bear. Those people might say all the right things, but fall woefully short when it comes to living them out. Jesus likens *"false prophets"* to *"wolves in sheep's clothing."* While they might appear innocent at first glance, they really are quite threatening.

The thing about wolves is this:

- They hunt tirelessly and persistently.
- They are all about preying on the weak.
- They hunt in the dark of night so not to be seen.
- They certainly aren't to be trusted.

Jesus knew there would be all sorts of people who would try and twist what he had to say and that those who followed him would need to be on guard lest they fall for what they were saying. We need to test what they say by the Word of God.

Counterfeiting is on the rise. Those trained to identify counterfeit study the real thing way before they begin to look at anything that's counterfeit. When it comes to spiritual things, if we acquaint ourselves with the truth, then those things that are less than the truth will be evident every time.

Paul was keenly aware of such things. He writes in II Timothy 4:3-4, *"For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths"*

Peter also speaks about such things. In II Peters 2:1 he writes *"There will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves."*

*"Watch out for false prophets,"* says Jesus.

### **Character, Instead of Charm and Charisma**

When it comes to such people we would do well to look for character instead of charm and charisma. You can't always tell a book by its cover. *"All that glitters is not gold."*

I love the story told of the farmer who was convinced his goat could very quickly discern a person's character. The farmer claimed that he could put a photo of a person in front of the goat and the goat could tell from the photo whether the person's character was good or bad. The goat ate the photos of those thought to be good and head-butted the photos of those thought to be bad. The farmer even relied on the goat to assess the character of the young men who dated his four daughters. That didn't always work out so well.

For Jesus the assessment of a person's character rests with a person's fruitfulness. *"You will know them by their fruit,"* he says.

The story of Jesus cursing of the fig tree in Matthew 21:18-22 right after his Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem reminds us just how important bearing fruit really is. Fig trees can look all well and good, but unless there's fruit, they are pretty much good for nothing.

Jesus had little patience with fruitlessness, whether it was a fig tree or a false prophet. In the same vein, he has little patience with a lack of fruit borne in our own lives.

### **Consideration of Our Own Lives**

Jesus challenges us, just as he challenges those who *"talk the talk, but don't walk the walk."*

In the end Jesus wants us to consider our own lives and the fruit we're bearing. And in considering our own lives and how we measure up we are immediately drawn back to our earlier discussion about the narrow gate. We are to be wholly given over to Christ—inside and outside.

Jesus asserts that it is not enough to simply say he's Lord, but to **live** as if he's Lord. Just like we are called to do with "*false prophets*," Christ calls us to continually consider the sort of fruit we're bearing. If we are faithfully offering ourselves to Christ, we will bear the fruit of those who are Christ's and Christ alone.

The fruit of the Spirit as Paul lists in Galatians 5:22 will be evident for all to see. "*But the fruit of the Spirit*," says Paul, "*is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*"

The fruit of our labor will also be evident. People will be drawn closer to God because of our efforts. People will be helped, needs will be met, and those on the margins of life will be encouraged. As Christ says in Matthew 25:40, "*I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these my brothers, you did for me.*"

It's a dangerous thing to pay **lip** service to the things of Christ, while not offering him **life** service. It all comes down to us giving him our lives.

In his book, *Radical*, David Platt challenges his readers to consider two fundamental questions, "*Do you believe in Jesus? And are you going to obey him?*" How you answer has tremendous effect upon the way you will live the journey set before you.

## **Our Own Journey**

In regard to our own journeys, the decision to follow, the desire to be faithful, and the resolve to remain obedient to God is critical. What we decide about these things is fundamental to all of life and informs all we do. And according to Jesus what we decide about such things has everything to do with our standing in eternity.

Just as Jesus talked about the lack of character exhibited by "*false prophets*," he challenges us about our character as well—a character that hopefully reflects God's good work in our lives. It's not enough to simply say "*Lord, Lord.*" It comes to us to follow the will of God. Our lives depend upon it for this life and for the next.

## **Two Gates**

And so it comes to us to decide which road we will travel.

Two gates stand before us, one is wide and the other is narrow.

- Behind one gate is the appeal of this world, which falls short every time.
- Behind the other is God's way for our lives, a way that brings peace, purpose, and the promise of life in Christ now and forever more.

Which gate will you walk through?