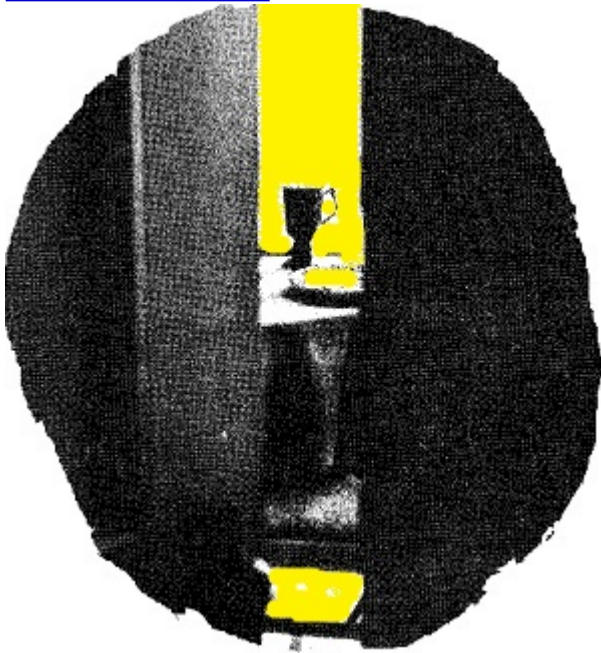


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“Enter through the narrow gate” (Matt 12:13).

*2 Kgs 19:9b-11, 14-21, 31-36; Matt 7:6, 12-14*

Today’s Gospel gathers several of what may have been common sayings in Jesus’ time, and he may have used them to illustrate the demands of conversion and discipleship. The ones about dogs and swine were likely Jewish insults against pagans. These harsh expressions reveal strong ethnic and racial prejudice in the culture Jesus was part of. Matthew 15:21-28 records him calling a Canaanite woman a dog, and in Matthew 8:28-34, he sends a legion of demons into a herd of swine that rush into the sea and drown.

Other sayings about narrow gates and the road to perdition are familiar images in the Gospels that heighten the challenge and urgency of following Jesus. He uses the image of a camel unable to pass through the eye of a needle to show that a rich man cannot enter heaven without surrendering his riches. “Many are called, but few are chosen” is another saying that emphasizes the seriousness of choosing the narrow door and knowing the real cost of discipleship.

In the middle of this collection of hard sayings is the Golden Rule. This was certainly central to Jesus’ teaching, and it returns us to the theme of love. People who panic over whether they will get into heaven need only remember that love is the one thing necessary. The famous Rabbi Hillel claimed he could recite the entire Law standing on one foot, then proved it by saying the *Sh’ma*, the commandment to love

God and neighbor. If we love, we need not fear judgment.

Being filled with the Spirit in these weeks after Pentecost should reassure us that God indwells us and is constantly encouraging us to move freely and joyfully through each day. We can travel light by letting love be our compass as we navigate life's ambiguities and complexities. We don't need a heavy rule book or a lot of rituals and reminders to stay on track.

Perfect love drives out fear, and mistakes are easily corrected with humble apologies and moving on. Self-forgiveness is allowed and encouraged to keep us from getting weighed down with worry or regret. If even Jesus grew and learned by the same human experiences he shares with us, then so can we. If Jesus was led by the Spirit to widen his ministry to more and more people, including outcasts, strangers, Roman soldiers, foreigners, lepers, Canaanite women and every kind of sinner, then we should not be afraid to embrace life's diversity and constant surprises. The only narrow gate we need to avoid is a narrow mind and a narrow heart. An open mind and a loving heart are all we need to find God.

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