

August 27, 2017    “It’s Not Easy Being Green”    Matthew  
7:13-14

I thought this morning just for the fun of it, we would begin with a game. The game is called “Name That Tune.” Amy is going to play it for you. Then I am going to give you several clues, to help you. The only person who is not eligible to play the game is Amy because I know she knows the answer, or she would not be able to play it for us....Amy if you please....the mystery tune!

Here are the clues. First of all, it was a hit recording for one of my favourite banjo players. Second, he sang the song on television back in the 1970s on a programme that was broadcast internationally. Third: the singer was widely recognized as one of the top MC’s on a weekly television variety show that did not bare his name. Fourth: the singer was one of the stars in either 6 or 7 full length motion pictures. And finally, the song has a colourful title. Name that tune!

It’s Not Easy Being Green. The singer was none other than Kermit the Frog and the programme on which he sang it of course was “The Muppet Show.” The lyric makes the point that it is not easy being a frog, a puppet, a singer and a star all at the same time. And of course, the reason we took time to play name that tune is this. It is also not easy being a follower, a disciple of Jesus. Matthew tells us that Jesus gave the crowds who followed him, and has also given us this wise piece of advise. “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the

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

What is all this about? Well, it was well known that there were many entrances to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. There is a wall around the old city. And there are a number of gates through which one can enter even today. An old spiritual proclaims there are 12 gates to the city. Most of them are wide and make or made access very easy. Crowds of people can enter at any given moment. However there was one gate that was narrow and small. It was called the “eye of the needle” because no camel (the main beast of burden in Jesus time) could enter without going down on its knees. Most men would have to bend over or at least lower their heads to use that gate. And needless, to say, it was not a very popular point of entry.

It did have one redeeming quality. Being a restrictive entrance to the city, at night the other gates could be closed and locked. And then a very small security detail could supervise this narrow and short gate, to make sure either that no one came in until daybreak, or that only people who clearly represented no threat to the balance of the population and the government, could enter. It was not good for traffic flow. But it was excellent for security. The narrow gate and the narrow way. A good modern example are those points of entry to the United States, and conversely Canada. Cars and trucks must

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move the gates one at a time. It is relatively easy for security to check identification, consult computer records and control access. The USA and Canada share that approach to security and there is a limited number of points across the international border where people can legally enter either nation.

What Jesus began by saying is “Enter through the narrow gate.” That is His counsel to all of us. Enter through the narrow gate. He went on to say as a comment on that point that wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction. And here is what that is about. In this world, in this life, regardless of what culture or country to which you belong there is a very basic insight that we need to recognize. It is easy to get into trouble. In some circumstances and some places all you have to do to get into trouble is say the wrong thing, express an unpopular opinion, express an idea that is contrary to the law or critical of the government. It is easy to get into trouble. All you have to do is...break the rules.

I hate to admit this but when I was in university I got into trouble. It had to do with crossing at one of those border crossings. My mother had an appointment at the Clinic in Duluth Minnesota. My father and I were driving to Duluth to pick her up and bring her home. When we arrived at the border there were no security people at the border. It had been snowing. Not a terrible storm, but the highway was not yet ploughed. My Father was dozing in the passenger seat. I was

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driving. So after considering what to do for a few minutes, I simply ventured on through. And about 30 miles into Minnesota I saw a car with flashing lights in the rear view mirror. I pulled over and we were invited to return to the point of entry, and I had to explain my actions. My father was singularly unhappy with me. The authorities were not pleased...but...this is important...times were different...they did not arrest me. They did not handcuff me or my father. Thank God for that. I would never have been allowed to drive my father's car again if anything like that had occurred! My story checked out. And we had to wait at the border while they checked the details by telephone. We were permitted to continue our journey, and we returned through the same border station the next day. Several months later we got a letter forgiving us my mistake, but also warning that I should never do something similar again. Imagine what would happen if you pulled that today.!!

I learned a big lesson that day. It is easy to get into trouble. All you have to do is break the rules and you can cause an international incident. Of course Jesus was not talking about such worldly realities. But the insight applies. Jesus was talking about sin. Sin is easy to fall into. Easy to commit. All you have to do is be careless. Some would say carefree. It is easy to get into trouble. It is easy to break the commandments. It is easy to do an unholy thing. All it takes is the clear desire to put

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your own well being first. Self interest leads to stumbling. Put yourself first in all things and it's a matter of time until you do a full fledged fall. Remember when we were kids and we would dare somebody to do something that might prove tricky. What did we say....nothing will happen.

Small is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life, and only a few find it. Jesus is talking about pursuing the will of God. The way of faith and faithfulness. And HIS whole point about pursuing the Kingdom of God is it takes effort. It takes surrender of your will. It takes consciously working towards Godliness. You have to dust off the Bible and actually read it. Do that and you are going to discover God's standards are more important than any one else's standards. To sin all you have to do is be thoughtless, or unloving, self centered. I used the word careless before. It is a good word...careless. Not caring about whether the gate is broad or narrow, about the nature of the road, about where it could lead. Jesus made this comment... "Only a few find the road that leads to life," meaning life eternal.

I have been thinking about that all week. The church is made up of a minority of the community's population. You can accurately extrapolate that to national figures. Christians are a minority in Canada, and the same is true in the world. One of the reasons is that being faithful is not easy. It takes effort. It takes focus. It involves submission to the leading

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of God and not simply doing what we want. Kermit got it right when he sang, "It's not easy being green."

Let us pray;

Lord help us to be your children and to want to live as your people. Grant that we may count the cost regularly, and be willing as you were to pay the price exacted by obedience and faithfulness. Lead us and guide us. Give us new hearts and new minds. Help us to seek the narrow path and to enter by the one gate that leads to life. In Jesus name we pray. Amen