

Message for 8-10-25

Shared by Rev. Ken Heintzelman

*'Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it. Matthew 7:13-14*

This passage is often misread, leaving people feeling uneasy and wanting to discard it. This may be especially true among fellowships like Shadow Rock, which emphasize a core value of inclusion. The passage suggests the existence of an "in" group and an "out" group. When we read it this way, and too often it is presented this way, it sounds like a few people are going to heaven and a whole lot of us are going to hell.

A person arrived at the gates of Heaven.

St. Peter asked, "Religion?"

The person said, "I went to Shadow Rock and started as a Methodist."

St. Peter looked down his list and said, "Go to the giant banquet hall, but be very quiet as you pass Room 8."

Another person arrived at the gates of Heaven.

"Religion?"

"I went to Shadow Rock and I hovered around the campfire of traditional theism."

"Go to the giant banquet hall, but be very quiet as you pass Room 8."

A third person arrived at the gates.

"Religion?"

"I went to Shadow Rock and I hovered around the campfire of non-theism."

"Go to the giant banquet hall, but be very quiet as you pass Room 8."

A fourth person arrived at the gates.

"Religion?"

"I went to Shadow Rock and I hovered around the campfire of atheism, and boy am I surprised!"

"Go to the giant banquet hall, but be very quiet as you pass Room 8."

The man said, "I can understand there being one giant banquet hall for all of us, after all, I went to Shadow Rock, but why must I be quiet when I pass Room 8?" St. Peter told him, "Well, the Christians are in Room 8, and they think they're the only ones here."

This passage is not about what the joke implies. It is at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, and it is addressed to believers in the early church. The wisdom of the passage is that we often decide in favor of life, but it is challenging to stay on that path. "*For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*" This passage is not about exclusion. It is about discernment.

I am speaking again about our calling to be discerning people during this season of our life together. Discerning people are wise people. Wise people are those who taste, feel, and sense the truth before it starts trending in society. Wise people are those who can name evil without mirroring it. Discerning people will forego liberal and conservative fashionable opinions for a deeper attunement to the work of the Spirit of Life and Love in our world. Wise people are people who perceive and respond to God's newest thrust in the midst of history. Wise and discerning people are people who perceive and respond to the life-leaning ways of the human spirit. Wise people are rare, but they are among us, and wisdom can be nurtured in all of us.

There is this notion that we are headed into uncharted territory. Our growing earth conscientiousness, our technological capabilities, and our sense of deep Spirit underlying all of reality are coming together for a new awakening. This means that traditional rational institutional formulas will not work as we orient ourselves toward the future. I hesitate to use the word "magic" because I do not believe in magic, but "magic" is descriptive of the edges and means of the way we discern and move forward. When we are in an age of the subliminal, we need discernment. We are living in times when one world is fading and another is emerging. We are in the neutral zone of transition as a church and as a society. We know where to look so we can get a glimpse of what is coming. Do you know how we know where to look? It is all the places and people that are being banned,

shunned, and denied by people who are fearful and abuse their power. Such cruelty and fear make the light of truth brighter.

So, when we discern what world we want to emerge out of the broken one, we will be blessed with new language, artists, and prophets. We need women, people of color, LGBTQIA people, and people of multiple intersectionalities more than ever. This does not mean people like me are left behind. It means that people like me, who are used to cluelessly moving through the world with power and privilege, can stop feeling threatened by those new to the table of power and discernment. Our discernment requires us to be a fellowship of people who engage in open dialogue and share with each other, and with people outside our group.

The road ahead is not paved with certainty, but with possibility. And as Jesus reminds us, the road that leads to life is not always the easiest one—it is narrow, it is challenging, and it requires courage.

Today, as we navigate transitions, we are invited to walk this narrow road together—not as a crowd, but as a fellowship, not as people clinging to comfort, but as people committed to transformation.

Wise people, Jesus implies, are those who choose the more challenging path—the one that leads to life. Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates, “Beautiful things are difficult.

As we welcome new voices, new people, new perspectives, and new ways, we do not diminish the value of those who have served faithfully. We simply expand the table. This is not a loss—it is a blessing. It is not a threat—it is a promise. The narrow gate does not exclude—it refines. It does not reject—it reveals.

When we gather for our potluck, take a few moments and look beyond the table you are sitting at. Look around at the wise people among us and do not diminish your wisdom and your voice.

Let us not be a crowd chasing comfort. Let us be a fellowship committed to discernment. Let us walk together, even when the road is hard. Let us listen for the Spirit in the voices we have not yet heard. Let us trust that the narrow gate leads to life—not just for some, but for all.

Spirit of Life and Love, guide us through this narrow gate. Give us the courage to walk the hard road. Give us wisdom to discern your voice in new places. Bless our leaders, givers, and workers, old and new. Bless our spiritual family as we become more fully who you are calling us to be. May we be a fellowship of the faithful, walking together toward life. Amen.

Next week, we continue to explore our calling to be a discerning people, and we talk about Stinkpots and Blowboaters.