**Narrow and Wide Gate**

**August 23, 2020**

*Matthew 7:13-14*

*“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.”*

Without a doubt, my favorite event we participate in with the youth group is Impact. Salt ‘n Light youth ministry is an organization based out of central PA whose goal is to have youth minister to youth. They work with churches to provide events where students can interact with each other, lead worship, and overall make it easier on youth leaders in the surrounding area. Impact is their most involved event – every July, they take over Camp Greene Hills in Alexandria, PA and invite hundreds of students to hear awesome teaching, invite bands to play awesome worship music, and themselves will prepare dozens of dramas, dances, music, and other creative arts pieces for students to connect with Christ in a camping festival atmosphere, much like Creation. In fact, Impact was started because Creation was cancelled one year due to weather, and Salt ‘n Light wanted to provide that opportunity for students in central PA. Over 20 years later, Impact is still going strong.

I didn’t know about Impact until I became youth pastor here at First UMC. Another youth pastor told me about it and invited me to stay with their youth group for a day to see what it was all about. I went, and had such an amazing experience, I knew immediately I wanted our youth group to attend. But throughout the whole day, there was one thing in particular that stuck with me – something that the evening speaker said that I will never forget: “Christianity is simple and hard, not complicated and easy.”

That became my go-to phrase for our youth group. Some of you older kids in our group know – I say that all the time. You might even make fun of me for it because I say it so often. That’s fine, I’m not offended, anything to get our students to remember that saying!!

The phrase might sound confusing the first time you hear it, but when you unpack it, it’s really a paraphrase of what Jesus says here in Matthew 7. True Christianity is a difficult road – it requires your concentration and care, and it can be uncomfortable at times – but the reward is life and eternal joy. However, many people will take the easy way out because it’s comfortable and doesn’t require a challenge. That’s not life-producing or rewarding.

The concept of Christianity is simple: Love God and love other people. That’s it. It’s like saying, “walk through that narrow gate, that’s it.” Simple to understand, but hard to follow through. However, many will try to complicate these concepts so that it’s an easier goal to accomplish. “Oh, but Jesus never said to love this person specifically,” or, “but this person wronged me so therefore they don’t actually deserve my love or grace.” – See how we can so easily twist up the words of Jesus to fit our own comfort level?

So, all this to say, don’t take the easy way out! Christianity is not easy. And that might not sound super encouraging, but it is the truth. However, that truth is what sets us free. It’s what gives us life and it is so rewarding. It’s worth it. And it makes life more joyful. We don’t have to jump through a bunch of different hoops to earn love or give love – we just love and are loved. That’s simple. It’s not easy, but it is life-giving!

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion*

1. What does the phrase: “Christianity is simple and hard, not complicated and easy” mean to you? What do you find hard about being a Christian?
2. How have you seen other people, organizations, or yourself, trying to complicate Christianity? What problems arise when we complicate these things?
3. In Matthew 7:13, Jesus says that many will enter through the gate that leads to destruction. Why do you think people do this? Do you think they realize what they are doing? How does the wide gate/road lead to separation from God?
4. Do you ever find moments where you are confused by what Jesus says in the Bible? Or, to put it a different way, does the Bible make it always seem like Christianity is simple? How did Jesus “simplify” the Old Testament law? How does other statements he made in the Sermon on the Mount simplify aspects of ways in which the first century Jewish people were living?
5. We’ve been exploring this Sermon on the Mount for several months now, and we only have one week left with it. Have you learned anything new from these lessons? Even though many of us are familiar with a lot of things in this passage, how have you gained new insight over the last few weeks?
6. Matthew 7:24 reminds us that we have to put these words into practice. How will you put what you’ve learned into practice as you begin your school year?