**21 OT-C Tension = Attention**

If what we were about here as we gather each Sunday was only a study of history, then today's Gospel could be simply dissected.

The “narrow gate” equals Jesus, the “first” equals the Jewish community to which he preached, and the “last” equals the Gentile community on the fringe.

But we believe that the same Holy Spirit that inspired the scripture writers to record this Gospel wants to move us here and now with Jesus’ words. We need to know not just what the scriptures meant to the people at the time it was written; we need to know what it is saying to us now.

Here is a basic principle of public speaking: **tension equals attention**. This is not something new. Tension is the reality that inspires attention in those experiencing it.

Share “American Idol” example...

Tension makes us pay attention, and the trick is to make sure that the tension and its resolution crosses at just the right time. *Timing is everything!*

The question posed to Jesus from the crowd today provides us with tension. “Lord will only a few people be saved?”

Notice the question is not “will I be saved?” or “how will I be saved?” The question is HOW MANY? The emphasis is on the number: few, many, or all.

Here’s the tension: (1) God desires all people to be saved, BUT (2) all people must freely accept God's offer.

How can the will of the All-powerful Creator be held up by the freedom of the created?

As with any tension, we can want to resolve the tension prematurely.

Some will want to say that few are saved because God only wants to save a prechosen lucky few.

Others will want to say all are saved because our freedom to say “no” is irrelevant. After all (they say), who could really say “no” to God, or how could God accept a “no?”

Either solution resolves the tension, but only by ignoring either the reality that God desires all people to be saved or by ignoring the reality that all people must freely accept God's offer.

The real resolution to this tension, however, lies not through either of these wide gates, but through a narrow one.

Look at this: “Lord will only a few people be saved?” How does Jesus respond? He ignores the speculation about numbers; doesn’t say few, many, or all. Jesus focuses instead on the struggle to be saved.

Jesus knows that restrictions to entering the Kingdom do not lie with God, but with our human response to divine invitation. The parable Jesus tells is meant to inspire us to not depend on “who you know” to get into the Kingdom, but rather on the necessity of our free yes to God’s will.

Jesus focuses on our struggle to say yes to God because we often say no. And this is where Calvary comes in...

Luke goes out of his way to point out that Jesus “passed through towns and villages teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem.”

Jesus is on his way to Calvary! It is there that the tension between God's will that all be saved crosses with our ability to say “no” to that will. Our no to God’s will brought the cross into existence!

Jesus knows that the cross is the narrow gate through which he must pass so as to open a path for us to God's reign. So, motivated by God's desire to save all people, Jesus freely chooses to sacrifice. This is Jesus’ yes to God’s will.

The tension between God's will that all be saved and our human freedom to accept or reject this offer remains to this day. A tension between God's will and ours. A tension between living for Christ or living for ourselves.

Fritz Pearls, a secular humanist, once answered the question “are you saved?” by saying, “Am I saved? I am trying to figure out how to be spent!” How are we being spent? For ourselves or for God?

 Our discipleship consists of accepting God's invitation to freely choose to embrace God's will that all people be saved through the narrow gate of spending ourselves in service to Christ.

Being spent for God is the only way to get through the narrow gate to salvation and timing is everything. Spend yourselves NOW.