

## “The Door to the Future”

I Peter 4:1-6; Luke 13:22-30

Highlands Presbyterian Church, Columbus

September 11, 2016 – 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Rev. Ronald W. Botts

Every couple of years we like to spend some vacation time in London, Ontario. It's a nice city, about half the size of Columbus, but with quite a few similarities. Like here, it's the home to a major educational institution—the University of Western Ontario. Like here, it's often used as a test city for new products because it has a representative population. Like here, it's the home of a number of major insurance companies and banks, more of a white-collar center rather than a manufacturing one. Like here, it's a city with a growing national and international reputation.

If you want to be in the middle of the middle in Columbus, you'd go to the corner of Broad and High. Londoners do the same by gathering at Richmond and Dundas. We have James Thurber as one of our most noted persons of the past; they have Guy Lombardo.

If there's any major difference between the two cities it's that they have less crime than we do. I remember a few years ago when the lead story on their evening news was that someone stole a car left running and unlocked in front of a grocery store. I wish that this was the worst we'd hear on our local channels.

Now in London there's a nursery that's noted for its high-quality plants. If you go into the tree section there, you'll find a prominent sign that reads: "The best time to plant a tree was 25 years ago." That may seem a rather discouraging thought, but it does remind a person that it takes some varieties a long time to mature. Oak trees, for example, are sixty years old before they bear any acorns. A redwood really gets going strong at about 200.

"The best time to plant a tree was 25 years ago." It would almost be enough for one to give up on the idea if it weren't for the next line of the sign which says, "The **second** best time is today."

Well, I think that sign is more profound than intended. Its advice relates to a lot of life. After all, you can't do much about what is past and gone, but you can do something about now and in the future.

Maybe that's at the basis of what Jesus says in our scripture from Luke this morning. The story tells us of a person who comes to him and asks, "Will those who are saved be few?" Now this had been a long-debated question in Jewish discussion. Some scholars suggested a relatively small number while others thought the elect would be greater, perhaps even to include all practicing Jews. It's doubtful that the question surprised Jesus. Yet, the way he answers it has a way of cutting right through any academic question to what's really important.

In effect Jesus responds, "Forget about how many will be saved. That's less important this this: what about you?"

All throughout his ministry Jesus proclaimed a core message that the Kingdom of God is now at hand. It was not something just of the future, but was also here and now. And its immediacy always prompted a further question, "What response are **you** going to make to it?"

So that in this particular instance, when the question was posed to him, the important thing was not numbers of people but only one person—the one who stood before him then. It was this man's salvation that Jesus was concerned about. Our Savior could only hope that he would be equally serious about his future.

Now there's a story about a fisherman down in Louisiana who always seemed to bring back a huge catch. This finally caught the attention of the fish and game people, and so they sent an agent to see if he could discover how the man was doing it. They figured there had to be some violation because nobody could be that lucky all the time.

So the agent dressed up in old clothes and went to the man's cabin and asked if he would take him out in the boat. He was quite willing to pay for the adventure since the fellow's reputation was known far and wide. The old man agreed, but became suspicious when he noted the fellow had no rod, tackle box, or net with him.

After a while the two men came to an isolated cove surrounded by tall trees. The agent watched with keen interest as the fisherman reached down into the tackle box, then pulled out a stick of dynamite. Immediately he lit the fuse and threw it far out into the water. There was a muffled explosion followed closely by the immediate surfacing of a large number of dead fish. He quickly positioned his boat and scooped up net after net.

That's exactly what the game warden had been looking for, and so he whipped out his badge and announced that he was going to arrest the man for illegal fishing and anybody else who similarly violated the law.

Now the fisherman didn't bat an eye but calmly reached down into his tackle box, pulled out another stick of dynamite, lit the fuse, and handed it to the government man. The agent was stunned, but the old man just said, "Well, son, are you gonna fish or are you just going to sit there?"

In a way that's just how Jesus returns the question to the man who posed it. "It's back to you now," he says, "and you don't have forever to decide how you're going to deal with it. If you haven't already made a personal commitment long ago, then the **second** best time is to do it now."

Perhaps you've noticed that some people go through life unconcerned about anything but their own immediate physical and emotional needs. They never seem to take time to deal with matters of the soul. These spiritually blind individuals can be anyone, even people who attend church. Mere presence at things religious doesn't necessarily guarantee personal action. What is needed is commitment and carry through.

Life presents us with many opportunities each day where we move ahead or just stay where we are. Some options we should go for, but others are better left unexplored. But, in the case

of faith, we're always called to move toward Jesus and look for the ways that he holds out to us.

Christ tells in so many ways that the door to the future is open to us, but we have to take the invitation. There's a celebration going on inside, but it's up to us to step forward and respond. The chance to share in God's Kingdom is extended to us with all of its benefits, or it can be refused. We can even be part of the good life, and then choose to walk away from it.

Our scripture story for today reminds us that it is all well and good to debate the theories of faith, but there's also a time when we have to take action. Here today we can respond to this open invitation by coming to the communion table and meeting Christ there. We can say "yes" and know that we will be joyfully received.

Jesus holds his hand out to us and asks, "Are you ready to come? If you didn't recommit yourself yesterday, then the next best day to go forward in faith is today.