Sunday, October 11, 2026　Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

"Enter Through the Narrow Gate"　Pastor Takaaki Inoue
Acts 20:18–24, Luke 13:22–30

❶【Enter through the narrow doorway】

Jesus was traveling through villages and towns, teaching as He made His way toward Jerusalem. Then someone asked Him, "Lord, are there only a few who will be saved?" (Luke 13:23). Jesus replied, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate. For I tell you, many will try to enter and will not be able to." (Luke 13:24). "Making his way toward Jerusalem" means moving toward death on the cross. Moving toward the cross means suffering, enduring shame, facing defeat, suffering loss, denying oneself, and letting go of one's desires. Meanwhile, the disciples and the crowd never imagined that they, too, were heading toward death. They believed that in Jerusalem, joy, glory, victory, gain, acquisition, and the fulfillment of their wishes awaited them. Jesus' path and that of the disciples and the crowd were polar opposites—as far apart as heaven and earth.

What does it mean to "enter through the narrow gate"? The Gospel of Matthew says, "Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate that leads to destruction is wide, and the road is broad, and many enter through it. But how narrow is the gate that leads to life, and how narrow is the road! Few find it. " (Matthew 7:13–14). I suppose "narrow doorway" and "narrow gate" mean the same thing. That narrow gate is the gate leading to the Kingdom of Heaven. Whenever I read this, something comes to mind.

●Did you know there's a pillar with a hole in it inside the Great Buddha Hall at Tōdai-ji Temple in Nara? It's the pillar right behind the Great Buddha. According to legend, if you can crawl through that hole, you'll be protected from illness and misfortune, so both adults and children line up to crawl through it. While children can pass through easily, adults often find it quite difficult. They have to set down their belongings, crawl on the ground, and have someone reach through from the other side to pull them through—only then can they finally make it through.

To pass through the narrow gate, you must lower yourself and bow down. This signifies a humble attitude of acknowledging your own sins. Furthermore, only one person can walk down the narrow path at a time. You cannot walk it even if you try to walk alongside others. Each person stands alone before God. You will be asked whether you have obeyed God. Life will end while you are blaming those around you for your misfortunes and joining others in speaking ill of others. You must examine your own sins and pray to God. Those who speak with God one-on-one and pray are the ones who walk the narrow path. This is the way of life for a monk. It is also a lonely path. You do not do something simply because others are doing it; rather, even if no one else is doing it, if Christ says, "Do this!" then you do

it. Even if everyone else is doing it, if Christ says, "Do not do this!" then you do not do it. It is a way of life in which you look up to heaven above, rather than to the side, and strive to be like Christ. That kind of resolve is necessary.

● You're probably familiar with cookie cutters. You use a star-shaped cutter for stars, a heart-shaped cutter for hearts, and an animal-shaped cutter for animals to cut out the dough.

In the same way, since the gate of the Kingdom of Heaven is shaped like Christ, you cannot enter the Kingdom unless you conform to it. The "narrow gate" is, in fact, Christ Himself. Therefore, you must not try to make Christ conform to you; rather, you must conform yourself to Christ's way of life.

❷【I don't know where you guys are from】

The gates of heaven are open to everyone, but the time will eventually come when those gates close. Once they close, even if you stand outside knocking on the door and say, "Master, open the door. We ate and drank with you, and we listened to your teachings," they will be told, "I do not know where you come from" (Luke 13:27), and they will not be allowed to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. These people who are denied entry into the Kingdom of Heaven called Jesus "Master," ate with him, and listened to his teachings—so it is clear they were Christians. Yet why were they not allowed to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? There are others who were told the very same words. Some said, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?" (Matthew 7:22), but Christ replied, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23). Likewise, the five foolish virgins who had not prepared oil were told, "I do not know you" (Matthew 25:12). What was their defining characteristic? It was that, no matter how many great deeds or miracles they performed in the name of Jesus, they did not heed God's will but acted selfishly. In other words, they did not make Christ their master; they made themselves their own masters. One could even say they used Christ. It does not matter whether they were zealous or not. People tend to become zealous when they want to get what they desire. Being zealous does not necessarily mean one is right.

The way one lives is the same on earth as it is in heaven. Those who practice their faith selfishly on earth will do so in heaven as well. Those who do not follow Christ on earth will not follow Him in heaven either. Those who did not feel they needed Christ that much on earth will not feel they need Him in heaven either. This is because people's ways of life do not change that easily.

❸【Choose the path of descent, not ascent】

Elsewhere, Jesus said to His disciples, "Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave." (Matthew 20:27) The disciples were seeking what everyone in this world seeks: to

be strong, great, wealthy, and prominent. But here, the Lord Jesus commands them to live in a way that is completely opposite to that. "Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave." This is a way of life that involves being weak, small, poor, and humble—the very way of life that Christ walked. Henri Nouwen wrote:

● "It means that Christian leaders, while speaking the name of Jesus, have continually succumbed to the temptation of power—that is, the temptation of political, military, economic, or even moral and spiritual authority. … It is a history in which God's people have at times been exposed to the temptation to choose power over love, domination over the cross, and to become leaders rather than those who are led. A true saint is one who resists this temptation to the very end and thereby gives us hope. … The path followed by Christian leaders is not the path of ascent that the world pursues with such great energy, but the path of descent that leads to the cross."

Aren't we thinking the same way as the disciples of old? That it is a blessing for the church to become larger, wealthier, and stronger—to rule the world and gain power. Yet the Psalms say: "O Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. I have calmed and quieted my soul; indeed, I am like a weaned child with its mother. " (Psalm 132:1–2) Furthermore, Proverbs states: "Make me neither poor nor rich; feed me only with the bread you have appointed for me. If I am too full, I may be unfaithful and say, 'Who is the Lord?' But if I am poor, I may steal and profane the name of my God. " (Proverbs 30:8–9) Human beings are given a "portion." We are taught to keep within that portion. To cross that boundary is called sin. In this world, it seems that moderation—stopping at eighty percent—is just right.

It has been 36 years since I came to this church. I wonder why this church does not become larger and more prosperous. But as the number of believers increases, they scatter. That is why we call it the "Tokoroten Church." Moreover, it is the influential believers who leave. I cannot help but think that God Himself is preventing it from growing any larger. A church's faith is more vibrant, and God's work is more evident, when it is small, poor, weak, and persecuted. When a church becomes large, wealthy, and strong, it becomes dominated by human calculations and human endeavors; the quality of faith declines, and it falls into corruption. We must choose the narrow path to the cross. It is not a path of ascent but one of descent. It is not a path of ease but one of suffering; not a path of glory but one of shame; not a path of victory but one of defeat; not a path of gain but one of loss; a path of letting others live while killing oneself; not a path where desires are fulfilled but one where they are let go. If God permits it, let us become great and wealthy in this world. If not, I want to walk this path without ever forgetting it.