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I really should just follow that with a resounding “Amen!” and leave it at that, but of course, I’m expected to add my two cents. As I’m sure those who have done this before me know, there is a lot of pressure in this whole senior sermon thing. All this week I have felt like you, the congregation, many of which I know quite well, are the vineyard owners and I, the poor, wilting tree waiting for inspection. This situation is made worse by the fact that I have witnessed and been part of the inspecting of other trees that have dared stand behind this podium and have successfully imparted so much wisdom. My leaves trembled all week as if I could feel in the ground your heavy footsteps approaching marking the days as they vanished before they had even started. My roots dug around for something to hold onto, but all I found were crumbling questions. What is my insight? How do I best compliment Sonia’s wit, deep intuition, and ridiculously skilled writing? Which passage works best? Which humorous anecdote should I drop in? Wait, why can’t I remember ANYTHING from 4 whole years at college to relate to this reading? What do I have to say? What do I need to say? What does God want me to say? After nestling in the Augustana greenhouse, do I have any fruit to show whatsoever?

Well here we are. You, the examiner, sit before me and I can’t tell you whether I have fruit or not because well, first of all, Sonia says it’s okay either way and secondly, I can’t see it...and I don’t think it is my duty to look at or judge my own fruit. I do not stand before you with righteous confidence and wise answers. All I have is a desire to take the passive, observing stance of a tree and if a few answers get caught in my branches or yours, than so be it.

But enough with my ridiculous fears and tree metaphors...for now. A return to the text will help. This 13th chapter of Luke is dense. Most who give a message on this part of Luke, choose one solitary paragraph or two because that is all that one get through. Everything from Sonia’s tree paragraph to Jesus healing on the Sabbath day, to that infamous mustard seed is in here. I decided to wrestle with the final part of this chapter because I have never really considered it after chewing through the unleavened bread and mustard seeds.

This passage starts off with an anonymous question. Awesome. “Lord, will only a few be saved?”. Woo...and what a doozie of a question, one that troubles me a lot. The answer is simultaneously blunt and vague, as is wonderfully typical of Jesus’ responses. “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.” Well, this makes sense I guess and because I enjoy metaphors like I enjoy a fine wine, I instantly thought of Augie as a house one tries to enter and it has a pretty narrow door and not everyone gets in. But that leads me to divulge in my second love, questions. Is a door the only way to enter a house? As many a curfued teenager has discovered, the window is a very effective, albeit physically challenging way to enter a house. Is there a curfue with this particular house or is there allowance of free passage in and out? We commonly get stuck on this notion of inside and outside space. It helps categorize and

organize our world and therefore, solidify identity and a sense of safety, two things humans desire so deeply.

The text goes on to alternate between phrases of judgment and rejection and broad inclusiveness. So what do we do with it? Well, in the tradition of my grandmother who would reenact bible stories to my sister and I before bed and to honor the theatre major flag I wave, I have to imagine this in dramatic terms. A whole horde of people trying to get through a narrow door, first I have to giggle but then wonder at the sport of it. In human terms (that's all I'm working with here), it would mean that those who actually got in would either have to be tiny or very forceful and rude. Everyone else gets knocked off by the doorframe or jabbed by elbows and then suddenly the Lord shuts the door. The losers kind of stand around for a bit, recovering from the craziness that just occurred and then of course, knock on the door and demand that the Lord reopen it. The Lord replies with, "I do not know where you come from." They reply, "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets." And a second time the Lord will say that he does not know where they come from...and how can you know who a person is without knowing their past? On a random note, this denial reminds me of Peter's later on. Then these rejects are told that one day they will commence with one of my favorite biblical phrases, "weeping and gnashing of teeth" when the prophets come to laugh at them. Then it seems like someone accidentally erased an entire transition because the next phrase tells of people coming from the east, west, north and south to eat in the kingdom of God. Where did these people come from? Who are they? Are they the ones that already shoved their way in earlier? Who knows. But this concept ends with the popular phrase, "Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last." This phrase out of context has been used quite a bit it seems as a statement on who gains access into the kingdom of heaven. But thinking about it in relation to the idea of this narrow-doored house changes how I comprehend this phrase. It does not say that anyone is being left out, it just comments on the pace that people will enter, but eventually everyone is going in...implied by the using the words last and first. Perhaps, those who shoved their way in, will be the last to really understand why they are there or maybe they are only physically in there. I'm not sure, but it is an important and interesting phrase to turn about in one's mind.

The reason I included the last part of this chapter is because after Jesus goes on to lament the fact that Jerusalem is not willing to be enveloped into God's fold, he suddenly disowns the house. He says, "See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'" If he is leaving this whole concept of space and houses, of who's in and who's out up to us...then what is he up to?

Well this is where I get to say a resounding "Amen!" to Sonia's, "Let time go, it's not in your control" message. I am in a constant, pointless battle with time and usually end up losing. But why am I even fighting? And where is Jesus in all this, what is He up to? He's busy pruning, digging, and yes, dare I say, scattering a bit of dung on us. He does not say, "And I tell you, you will not see me unless you say...but rather until the time comes WHEN you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of Lord.'"

I have to admit to you that I am the senior who is every parents' nightmare...God help mine. I have no idea where I'm going, what I'm doing after I graduate, or if I'm ready to flower, but one thing I've definitely learned and relearned from my time at Augie also happens to be the overall theme that I see in this chapter of Luke. Be ever so cautious in thinking you have the right answer, that you've got this whole life thing down and under control and always ask questions and turn things upside down, inside out etc. You don't have to be right and you will never have all the answers. I don't have all the answers right now...but my job is to keep going, doing, testing, questioning, learning, listening, loving and being utterly and humbly human. Because while I am freaking out, falling apart, hoping to survive the day to day stress, trembling before you, trying not to drown in the endless chatter of questioning in my heart, God is patiently, lovingly doing some serious gardening. Be still my soul, the Lord is on thy side and thanks to be God for that. Amen. And now, because singing a hymn is often the best sermon for me, please look to the words printed in your bulletin. For those note lovers out there, myself included, sorry the music couldn't be printed.