

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Trinity 14 – Sept 10, 2023
Luke 17:11-19 – The Path of Wisdom
Pastor Peter Wagner

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

There are two paths, two ways. One path leads to death, the other to life. One leads to salvation, the other to destruction. And one path is much easier to find and follow. Jesus warns in Matthew 7, “The gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

Today, we live in comfort. The broad and easy way is very broad and very easy. Thankfully, times of suffering, great evil, and persecution have not yet come upon us. But this means we walk in another kind of danger. The path of destruction runs too close to the path of life. It looks too similar. To the careless eye, the two roads may be impossible to tell apart. And it is too easy to live a double life, a church life and a regular life. Too easy to think we can walk both paths at once, or switch from one to the other. Too easy to think we have the wisdom to handle it.

But that is the way of foolishness, the way of death. Christians should not be able to blend in. For the two roads may seem close together, but they end far apart. Jesus alone is the path of life. “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” All other religions, philosophies, and secular worldviews are false, they all lead to death and hell.

So walk in the path of life and no other. Walk by faith in the God the Son. And pray earnestly that he would keep you out of the broad and easy road. As King Solomon commanded his son in the Old Testament reading from Proverbs 4, “Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life. Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on.”

Flee from temptation. “Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.”

You know that God’s word is the only guide that reveals the path of life. Psalm 119 says so, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.” And Proverbs 4 says the same, “Hear, my son, and accept my words.”

Throughout Proverbs, this voice of God’s Word is the voice of wisdom. Wisdom speaks against the woman of folly, the woman of the pleasures of this world, the forbidden woman, the adulteress with her smooth talk. “For her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the departed; none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life.”

“But wisdom is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.”

These words describe Jesus, the living word of God. Your Lord Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God and the power of God. He is the Word who was with God in the beginning, the word by whom all things were made. He makes wisdom known to you. He reveals the path of life, because he is the way of life. The way, the truth, and the life. He is the light of the world, the lamp to your feet and the light to your path. And Jesus stands in the way, calling to all mankind, with the voice of wisdom, “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

“To you, O men, I call,” he says in Proverbs 8, “And my cry is to the children of man. O simple ones, learn prudence; O fools, learn sense. Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right, for my mouth will utter truth.”

And now, today, in the gospel reading about the ten lepers, you see the living Word walking in the path of truth. He who is the way, the truth, and the life, who himself is the wisdom and power of God, the lamp to your feet and the light to your path – he is standing and walking in the way, on the road to Jerusalem. In his wisdom, a wisdom that is folly to men, he is going up to Jerusalem to die. To be mocked, spit upon, and crucified, for you. The foolishness of God is wiser than men. He is passing through the valley of the shadow of death for you, to blaze the path of life.

And as he passes on his way to Jerusalem, he goes between Samaria and Galilee, calling all who will hear – Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans – calling them to hear his voice and follow him.

But only a few heed him. Only a few recognize him as the path of life. When he has mercy on the ten lepers, when he tells them to go show themselves to the priests, they all turn away from him and run ahead on the road toward Jerusalem. They run the wrong direction. They run to show themselves to earthly priests in an earthly temple, but they turn their backs on the real great high priest of the new covenant, who is about to offer his body as a perfect once-for-all sacrifice in their place. His body is the true temple. He is about to let his enemies destroy this temple, in order that he might raise it up again in three days.

No earthly priest can cleanse a leper, only God can do that. Priests were supposed to examine a leper and decide if he had been healed. But these lepers were running away from a heavenly priest who could cleanse them in body and soul by his blood. He could heal not just their leprosy, but their sin. But in their folly they ran ahead on the broad and easy road. They chased the path of destruction toward an earthly temple and earthly priests, without recognizing Jesus as God. And so even though their skin was healed, they did not find salvation.

Only one man, when he saw he was healed, turned back. And he was a Samaritan. He alone returned to Jesus, praising God with a loud voice. He alone turned to the path of life, to follow the one who is life. He fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. He praised God and worshipped at God's feet. He recognized this man before him as God with us.

So by faith, the Samaritan was healed in body and soul. He entered the path of life. Jesus said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well." In Greek, Jesus actually said saved, "Your faith has saved you." Not just cured your skin, but saved you from all evil, from the path of destruction. Saved you from hell, brought you into the way of life.

And without a doubt, when the Samaritan heard these words, "Rise and go your way," he rose but did not go away. No, he rose and followed Jesus. For his way had become the way of his Savior. His path was now the path of Jesus, no matter what. And though Jesus' path would lead to Jerusalem and the cross, yet it led to life. Resurrection, ascension, and heaven. Following Jesus, this man might have to endure trials far worse than leprosy. Perhaps persecution or martyrdom. It did not matter. Because his Savior was with him.

Dear saints, the path of Jesus has also become your path. In baptism, you have been joined permanently to the way of your Savior, your life to his. So follow him who is life. Hear the voice of God in his words of wisdom, in Scripture. Fall at his feet, to worship and praise him as God.

And what does his path look like? Look back at Proverbs 4. "The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day." Like the rising sun and the brightening dawn, the path of Jesus grows ever brighter. Today it may be difficult to distinguish from the broad and easy road. But as you proceed and grow in the word, Jesus the light of the world will illuminate the truth. He will teach you in the way, so that you grow in wisdom, learning to flee the temptation of the evil road.

And he will give you wisdom to understand that the road that leads to life is not easy. At times it passes through deep darkness. It passes through temptation and suffering, even the valley of the shadow of death. Loved ones die, discouragement of the long journey sets in. When these things take place, be strong and take comfort. Because you are baptized into Christ, you are saved. Your path is joined to his path, your life to his.

And you know how dark his path once was. Jerusalem, the cross, the grave, hell itself. But with the light of dawn of the third day, his path shone brightly. He rose, ascended, and passed through the heavens. So when you pass through the valley of the shadow of death, you shall fear no evil. For your good shepherd is with you. Your high priest has been tempted as you are and has passed through the heavens. Now he is with you to comfort and guide you by his rod and staff. To keep you in the way by the wisdom of his discipline and instruction. He will not let you stumble. He will not let your foot be moved. He will lead you in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

"In God, my faithful God, I trust when dark my road; great woes may overtake me, yet He will not forsake me." Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.