

Midweek Lent #2 Sermon
(03/01/23)

Text – John 14:1-14

Theme – “The Way”

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

As I said in a funeral sermon recently, the Bible ends just as it begins: with the perfect world. A world free from sickness, aging, pain, disease, crime, violence, hatred, death. A world free from Satan’s interference and attacks. A world free from sin. God promises us that it will be again just as it was then: perfect. How we long for that time and place! Ever since Adam’s fall, that has been the hope and dream of mankind: to get back THERE. To regain what was lost. To have that place in the Father’s house and family. But how? How can we ever get there now, fallen and sinful as we are?

All sorts of people have devised all sorts of ways to try to get there again. So, for instance, Adam and Eve tried to cover over their sin with fig leaves. Cain tried to win God’s acceptance by a sacrifice showing his worth and importance. The folks at Babel tried to take heaven for themselves by building a tower to the skies. The pagan nations made their own gods to worship, hoping *they* could give them heaven.

And we try too, don’t we? We scheme to get more and more money and property, thinking that THESE will give us the “good life”. We worship at the altar of our own false gods and idols: family, recreation, sports teams, the farm. We set our good works before God, as if they can be our ticket in. We tell ourselves that whatever makes us happy MUST be good and right.

But all those ways are just false trails leading — not to heaven — but hell. No, there is only ONE Way. Tonight, as we continue our look at St. John's account of Christ's last days, we will hear again what that Way is. (pause)

I suppose the best place to start is at the beginning. On why we need a Way at all. As I said, the Bible starts with a perfect world, so what happened to it? Well, you all know the story (in fact, it was last Sunday's Old Testament lesson). You remember how the Serpent crawled up to Eve and got her to wonder and doubt. To question her heavenly Father's words and love. To think that maybe God had been holding out on Eve and her husband. You know how she took the forbidden fruit – listening to Satan's lies rather than God's truth – and ate. You remember how she gave to Adam and how he (although he KNEW it was a lie) also ate. And in that moment, all came crashing down. Their eyes were opened – not to God's love (for to **that** they became blind) but rather to sin and its horrible, hellish consequences.

They are still standing in Eden, but it is not the same anymore. It was all gone in a flash: harmony with God, with creation, with one another. They are outsiders now, looking in at what is no longer theirs. Now they were filled with fear. And that led to hatred and more sin. When God comes to them, they hide. They lie. They blame anyone and everyone except themselves. And how will they ever get back in?

All their own attempts and efforts were pathetic failures. They were locked out and cannot get themselves back in. But when God comes, He brings the Key. He shows them the Way. Listen again to Genesis 3:15, where God says to the Serpent:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.

There is the Way! The promise of a Savior, One who will crush Satan underfoot and give back to Adam's children what he had surrendered and lost. How God will do it, they do not know. But God has given them the treasure map to heaven. And the Way, the Path, is that promised "*Seed of the woman*" who will defeat Satan and, in so doing, will restore us to Eden once more.

Throughout the Old Testament, God filled in more and more of the details. This Savior will come from Abraham's race, Judah's tribe, David's family. He will be born in Bethlehem, the Son of a virgin. And He will lead us into Eden again only by suffering the price for our sin. You know the prophecies – we hear them, over and over again, every year, during Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter. The Way is splashed all over the pages of the Old Testament. It's everywhere you look, if you only know what you are seeing.

But, sadly, apart from the working of the Holy Spirit, no one CAN see it. That's why we find people missing the obvious. We wonder how could the Jews not put it together when Jesus comes? He fulfills ALL the prophecies. All the Old Testament. But they don't get it. Not even the Twelve. So it is that we hear Thomas – old Doubting Thomas – ask Jesus: "*We don't know where You are going, so how can we know the Way?*"

How exasperated and disappointed do you think such a question must have made Jesus? All this time, all His preaching and teaching, all the miracles they had witnessed, all God's Word that pointed straight to Him – and STILL they don't get it! "What Way is that again, Jesus?"

But then we need to take a good long hard look at ourselves. At how we are also led astray, off the Way, onto other paths. The false trails I spoke of at the beginning of the sermon. The winding walks onto which we wander. But can any of them really lead us to Paradise? No. None of them. There is only ONE Way.

Listen to Jesus' answer to Thomas' question: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except by Me." You see, it's Jesus – and Him alone – that brings us home. Home to the Father. Home to the place He has prepared for us. Home to Eden, to the New Jerusalem, to the restored/purified heaven and earth for which we long. (pause)

Jesus is the Way. The only Way. Because He is the only One who can defeat sin/death/devil. None of us are a match for that unholy trinity, but Christ – God in the flesh – is MORE than a match. He picks up our sin and carries it to the cross. He pays the full price demanded for sin – ALL sin. And because all sin is on Him, it is no longer on us. We are free, we are forgiven. And for that reason Satan has no more ability to accuse us. He no longer owns and terrorizes us. We are not his playthings and victims any more. Instead, we are brought home to God's family. And He always takes care of His own. That means that absolutely nothing – not even death – can separate us from His love again.

Now, the devil still tries to get us to step off that Way. He tries to get us to put our trust and hope elsewhere, in false gods and idols of our hearts, but we know they cannot deliver heaven to us. Satan still tries to get us to put stock in what WE do, as if those things supplement or complete Christ's work. But we know that our good works are only our response to His gift of forgiveness and eternal life; they do not earn those things.

No, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we fix our eyes only on Christ. He has done it all for us. He is our Hope. He is our Righteousness. He is our Life. He is our Way. And we will follow that Way wherever He leads. Because we know our ultimate and eternal destination. (pause)

Jesus also said that He is the Truth. He reveals the truth about God. Satan lies and deceives, he tells us that God is NOT our loving Father but an angry Judge. Or One that we

need to appease and buy off with our gifts and offerings and sacrifices. Or One who just doesn't really care, being too high and exalted to waste time on such insignificant beings as us. But those are all lies! And it is Jesus who shows us the truth.

Now, it is true that our sin DOES merit – even demand – punishment. God has made that clear from the very beginning when He told Adam that to sin was to die. And God has repeated that in the Law – the Law written on our hearts, but even more so in the Law as revealed to Moses. So, that much of Satan's words ARE true. But he would have us miss the second part of what God says: the Gospel.

There we see God's true face. Our Father, who loves His children so much that He gives everything for them. So it is that God came down from heaven to take our place. To live and die for us. To suffer the penalty WE deserve. Look at the manger, look at the cross, look at the empty tomb and you will know who God really is. And He did all that for YOU. To save you. To have you as His own. To protect and deliver you from harm, from hell.

The devil is a Liar. But Jesus is Truth itself. He **cannot** mislead you. Instead, He shows you who God is. And who you are. He is Love. And you are His forgiven children, now and forever. Simply by trusting in His Word and promise. The mask Satan put on God when Adam sinned has been torn aside by Christ. And now we know the Truth. (pause)

Finally, Jesus says that He is the Life. God is the Author of life. He gives life, not death. Rather, it is Satan who brings death in his wake. Adam and Eve found that out the hard way. And we live in a dying world because of it. But Jesus comes to give us life again. Not just here and now (although our earthly life too comes from Him), but forever. In that perfect world of which we hear in Genesis and Revelation. A world where there is no more death, because there is no more sin.

However, to win that life for you, Jesus had to die. A paradox, to be sure. But it is so. To give you life, Jesus had to take your death at Calvary. But not even death was strong enough to overcome our Lord! No, He rose again on the third day. Death has no more power over Him, and so it has no more power over us. Yes, we will die...and yet we will *never* die – another paradox, but another truth. For when this life ends, we go to be with the Father. And then, at the end of time, Christ will return. He will raise up our bodies and then we will live forever in that new perfect world He has promised ever since Adam lost the first. (pause)

Sometimes we all feel like Adam and Eve, standing at Eden's gate and knowing we are outside. That we cannot get in. That the angel with the flaming sword keeps us out. But there IS a Way back in: Jesus. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He has revealed the Father to us. He has brought us back to the Father, and made us His children once more. He has given us life, now and forever. And absolutely nothing – not sin, not death, not the devil himself – can ever take that away from us. He has promised and so it must be.

There is only one Way. Jesus. And today He again comes to us in His Word, to lead us and guide us and bring us to heaven. To Eden. To everlasting life. Stay on the Way and follow wherever He leads. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Hymn — *“Baptismal Waters Cover Me”* (LSB #616)