

# "The New Path"

Text: Isaiah 43:16-21

**"May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you."** Amen. (1 Peter 5:10)

Dear Fellow Christians:

We tend to lose sight of just how things used to be, and are reminded by the little things that pop up from time to time. Like walking, for example. As late as the 1950's a sure way to garner the attention (and ridicule) of your neighbors was to walk somewhere, just for the sake of exercise. It just wasn't done all that often. People did plenty of walking (probably much more than they do today) but their walking always had a purpose. They had somewhere to go or something to do. The walk itself was not the purpose.

Our landscape changed as our habits changed. The first change was the addition of sidewalks – on virtually every street. Next came the widening of those sidewalks, making it easier for two to walk side-by-side. Take a walk in an old neighborhood and then in a new one and the change will be obvious. The latest addition is walking paths, dozens of miles of dedicated paths just within the Bismarck City Limits that were constructed and are maintained year-round for the sole purpose of a pastime that really didn't even exist 50 or 60 years ago.

Given the fact that there are hundreds of miles of sidewalk and walking paths already in existence in most cities, it always surprises me to hear that city planners are considering the construction of additional paths. Do we really need a new path?

According to our text for this morning, our God certainly thinks so – though obviously for a different sort of "walk." The text that will guide us this morning into the general topic of paths is found recorded in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, the 43<sup>rd</sup> Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 43:16-21 Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, <sup>17</sup> who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: <sup>18</sup> "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. <sup>19</sup> Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. <sup>20</sup> The wild beasts**

***will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, <sup>21</sup> the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.***

So far the very words of our God. There is great comfort in knowing that these words are true and right in every regard. They are also therefore worthy of our intense study and meditation. That we might gain the full benefit of these words through our study this morning, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."*** Amen.

The history of the Jews was, in a sense, one of paths. God started the nation with Abraham and led him and his family on a new path – to the south, to the Promised Land. When famine threatened their very existence, God led them on another path to the south, to Egypt. Enslaved there for 400 years, God again created for them a path to freedom.

It is there that our text picks up the story. Our text first refers back to the time when, having created for them that impossible path out of slavery (not only with all of their possessions but with the plunder of Egypt), they found themselves on what by all appearances looked to be a path to nowhere. A dead end. A deadly end. Not only was the mighty Egyptian army bearing down on them – clearly displeased with the Jews for the devastation their God had visited upon them – the Jews had nothing with which to defend themselves. For the past 400 years they had enjoyed no Second Amendment rights. They were sheep, penned for the slaughter.

Or so it appeared.

But *God's* path is never a path to nowhere. It's always a path home. Walking on God's path is always a guarantee both of his divine favor and his divine protection. But walking that path requires implicit trust in the one who laid it out. This was the lesson they needed to learn, which was exactly why God's path had led to that impossible, inescapable catastrophe-waiting-to-happen. They needed to learn to doubt their eyes and trust their God.

The lesson played out like this: only when the Children of Israel were absolutely convinced that all was lost, God himself showed them the new path. His path. As Isaiah pointed out, the same path that meant

escape and freedom for his people meant death and destruction for his enemies.

This was the premise that God the Holy Spirit, speaking through Isaiah, wanted to establish in our text. This was the validation for what came next. In other words, the same God who had revealed his power to make a path of escape where none previously existed, where no one ever thought possible, was able to repeat that power in every possible circumstance for every single one of his children. In fact it formed the basis or authority for what he was about to tell them. His message was this: *Don't look for the logical path, the old path, the well-worn path. My path will be different. Look for the new path that I, in good time, will show you.*"

But the Jews proved, repeatedly, that they weren't ready to trust God's direction, to walk on his path. They hadn't learned to trust him, especially when their eyes saw only a dead end. So God tested them. He led them on a path through the wilderness to another apparent dead end – the borders of the land he had promised to give them. The spies went in, the spies came out, and 83% of them reported that the path stopped at the border. The people that occupied the land were just too strong. Too formidable. Too... everything. Two of the twelve spies saw the same things the others saw. Their reaction was not *"Woe is us!"* but *"Lucky us!"* They didn't focus on the negative; they saw only the positive. They saw no obstacle, only the incredible land the Lord was giving them. Eyes lie. God doesn't.

The hand-wringing, eye-trusting majority won. The people turned away without even trying, without even giving their God a chance to prove himself reliable – as if he hadn't already done that. So that same Lord gave them a very different path, and their new path truly was a path to nowhere. He led them back into the wilderness on a path that would wander aimlessly for forty years until every last adult doubter was dead – every last adult who, even with all that they had witnessed, still didn't trust that their God loved them enough or was powerful enough to guide them safely.

Yet it's probably not accurate to say that God led *Israel* on this path to nowhere. That path was for the *Jews*. "Israel" is best seen as a subset of the Jews, made up of those Jews who actually trusted their God and clung tenaciously to his promises. Why is this a necessary distinction? Because you and I are now part of "Israel" – though most of us have absolutely no connection with the Jews. More on this later.

With the doubters all dead, God's path led again to that seemingly impregnable border, to that apparent dead end. This time, though the defenders were still just as formidable and the cities just as heavily fortified, Israel followed God's path into a rich land all their own. City by city they came into possession of "a land flowing with milk and honey."

Carry this all forward a couple thousand years and you will find that not much has changed. God has established a new "Israel," and you and I are part of it. Paul spoke of this in his Letter to the Romans: ***Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.*** <sup>26</sup> ***And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";*** <sup>27</sup> ***"and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."*** (Romans 11:25-27) "Israel" now includes the sum total of all believers, all who will be saved, all who trust the promises of God rather than their own senses or inclinations. Human ideas represent a path to nowhere, both then and now.

Make no mistake. The Israel of today (of which we are members) is often put to the same test as the Israel of the Old Testament. The path our God lays out before us routinely runs into what are, by all appearances, dead ends. God's path regularly leads to apparent catastrophe and inescapable calamity. Ask anyone who has been hopelessly in love with an avowed unbeliever. Anyone who has faced "unavoidable" financial ruin. Anyone who has come face-to-face with "irreparable" marriage problems, "impossible" family crises, depression, anxiety, or disease.

These are our unscalable walls and our undefeatable enemies. These are our unstoppable, rushing enemy armies. The vast host of the godless lie not only arrayed in front of us, they are all around us. In our case the path laid out by our God is not simply to destroy them; it is to win them over. Who would ever imagine that such a thing could be done? Who could possibly sum up the courage to put one foot in front of another along such a path?

These are our tests. These are our blind, impossible paths. We are surrounded by those who are walking purposely on a path to nowhere. A path to *somewhere*, actually, but certainly not the destination they envision.

Again, who can possibly pass such tests or meet such challenges? Who can ever learn to ignore his senses, and step forward? Blindly. Boldly.

That's where the second half of our text comes in. Hear again *God's* words – the same God who **"makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick."** The God therefore who has already repeatedly demonstrated his power to steer us through impossible barriers and to guide us safely where we never imagined we could venture has already given us every reason to trust him. Hear what *that* God says:

**"Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old.**  
<sup>19</sup> **Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"**

Here is the promise of the very gospel itself – the greatest deliverance from impossible circumstances that the world has ever known. The enraged host of our own sins once pressed us, imperiled us, condemned us. There was simply no way out, for **"all we like sheep had gone astray"** and **"the soul that sins shall die."** No possible escape, until God pointed to that way – to his Son. His Word, the Scriptures, point always and only there, to Jesus. *"There is your new path. There is your deliverance from the enemies against which you were powerless. As I once rescued Israel from the Army of Egypt, so I have provided you a path to safety and life through faith in Jesus Christ."*

How impossibly easy, where once there was no hope. As the waters of the Red Sea once parted, so also a path to freedom and life has been opened to us. The Lord has laid on Jesus Christ the iniquity of us all. Through faith in his Son, you and I have already been declared not guilty. The danger has passed. Our sins can no longer condemn or threaten. Their power over us lies broken, never again to rise.

Who would have thought? Who could have imagined an escape so simple, so painless – at least for those who were rescued? Only the God with whom nothing is impossible. The God who, in the words of our text, can **"make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.** The God who can **"give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise."**

Such a God, who miraculously solved our most terrible, pressing dilemma, can be trusted. His paths can be trusted to lead reliably and

safely – *when we actually follow them.* The way is usually not a mystery to us; it's just the apparent impossibility that gives us pause. The bottom line from our God in our text for this morning: *Trust me. Walk in faith where I direct, no matter how impossible the outlook, and I will keep you safe. Until that path finally leads you home.*  
Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Philippians 3:8-14** Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-- <sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> ¶ Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 20:9-20** And he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. <sup>10</sup> When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>11</sup> And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>12</sup> And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. <sup>13</sup> Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' <sup>14</sup> But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' <sup>15</sup> And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup> He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!" <sup>17</sup> But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?" <sup>18</sup> Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." <sup>19</sup> ¶ The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. <sup>20</sup> So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The Fifth Sunday in Lent – March 13, 2016**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 21 (Verses 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Jehovah Let Me Now Adore Thee"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The First Lesson:** (Philippians 3:8-14) Our first reading is another of those clear, precise explanations of the gospel – and how that good news makes Christianity different from every other religion in the world. No other religion proclaims salvation on the basis of what someone else has done, rather than through what the individual himself must do. When Paul was given this truth, every other idea became trash to him.

## Psalms 38 (Supplement page 39) (Brown Hymnal)

**The Second Lesson:** (Luke 20:9-20) Jesus here tells a parable to illustrate how the Jews had continually rejected the prophets, and would also reject Him as God's Son. We are not immune from the temptation to reject God's Words and His representatives when they tell us what our sinful flesh does not want to hear. We are supposed to learn from the dishonorable actions of others, not copy them.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 35 (Red Hymnal)

"Songs of Praise the Angels Sang"

## The Sermon – Text: Isaiah 43:16-21 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"The New Path"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## Offering followed by the Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 304 (Verses 1,3 & 5) (Red Hymnal)

"An Awe-full Mystery Is Here"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

## The Distribution -Hymn 311 (Red Hymnal)

## The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 304 (Verse 6) (Red Hymnal)

"An Awe-full Mystery Is Here"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

**Attendance** - Sunday (62) Average (46) Wed (28) Organ Fund (\$22,000 of \$22,000)

## This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and Coffee time
	<b>-11:30 a.m.</b>	– Church Council Meeting
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-5:45 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Final Midweek Lenten Service
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee time

**CLC News** – Pastor Matthew Hanel is considering the call to Holy Trinity of West Columbia. Pastor Neal Radichel is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato. Teacher Sara Pfeiffer is considering the call to Gethsemane of Spokane.

**Church Council Meeting** – The Church Council is scheduled to meet after the fellowship time this morning.

**Organ Update** – As of last Sunday the new organ is fully funded! Way to go, members of St Paul! Installation is now planned for the week of the 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Confirmation Class** – Please note that Confirmation Classes is scheduled for 5:45 pm on Wednesday of this week.

**Sound Baffles** – The final phase of our "anti-echo campaign" in the fellowship hall is to install sound baffles behind the banners. The frames have been constructed, but we need a couple volunteers to paint them. It will be light, easy roller work. Please let Brian know if you can help.