

"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, mile after mile of dedicated paths just within the Bismarck City Limits – paved paths constructed and 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 believes that to be true – 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 43rd Chapter:

^{ESV} Isaiah 43:16-21 Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, ¹⁷ who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: ¹⁸ "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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,

²¹ the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

This is God's Word. 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, 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 the newly freed Jews needed to learn, which was exactly why God's path had led to that impossible, inescapable catastrophe-waiting-to-happen by the shores of the Red Sea. They needed to learn to doubt their eyes and trust their God.

Only when the Children of Israel were absolutely convinced that all was lost did God himself show them the new path. His path, and as Isaiah also 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 and is 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 – to 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: ***Least 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. ²⁶ 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"; ²⁷ "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 his children 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. ¹⁹ 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, enslaved 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 – who described himself as **"the way, the truth, and the life."** 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. God the Father 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."**

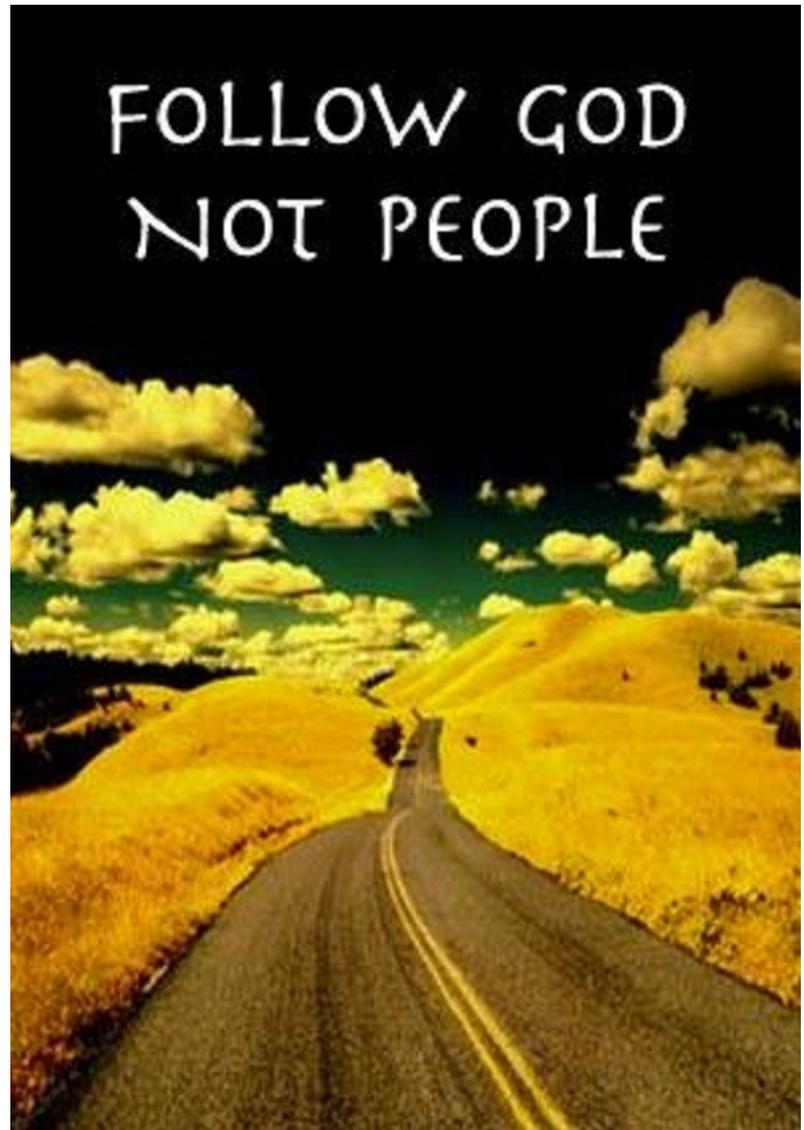
Such a God, who miraculously solved our most terrible, pressing dilemma, can be trusted. His paths can be trusted to lead reliably and safely – *when we actually follow them.* The way is usually not a mystery to us; it's just the apparent impossibility that gives us pause. *That* God, *our* God calls to us: *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.

ESV **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 Christ⁹ 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--¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.¹² ¶ 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.¹³ 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,¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

ESV **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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed.¹² And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out.¹³ Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.'¹⁴ 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.'¹⁵ And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?¹⁶ He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!"¹⁷ 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'?"¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."¹⁹ ¶ 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.²⁰ 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.

ESV **Isaiah 43:16-21** Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters,¹⁷ who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:¹⁸ "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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,²¹ the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.



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The Fifth Sunday in Lent – April 3, 2022

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 18 (*Red Hymnal*)
"Lord, We Come Before Thee Now"

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 worthless to him.

Psalm 38 (*Supplement page 39*) (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 20:9-20) Jesus here uses 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. Their end is destruction.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15 (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 35 (*Red Hymnal*)
"Songs of Praise the Angels Sing"

The Sermon – Text: Isaiah 43:16-21 (*Printed on the back of this bulletin*)
"The New Path"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 721 (*Brown Hymnal*)
"God of Grace and God of Glory"

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 798 (*Stanzas 1 & 4*) (*Brown Hymnal*)
"God, We Praise You"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (25) Average (30) Wednesday (18)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:15 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Palm Sunday Worship
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Gethsemane School of Spokane has called Teacher Ross Kok. Pastor Tom Naumann has returned the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet this morning during the fellowship hour.

Sponsors Needed – Kinship has announced the need for more sponsors, both for orphans and seminarians in our overseas sister congregations. Fields of opportunity are continually expanding, as are the needs for support from those who are moved to do. Financial support ranges from \$25/month to \$50/month. For more information please call, email, or text Dan Roehl— danroehl@hotmail.com / 507-381-2042.

Final Midweek Lenten Service – A reminder that our final Midweek Lenten service is scheduled for this Wednesday at 7pm.

Holy Week – Holy Week begins next Sunday (Palm Sunday). Though the world places little value on such things, Christians rightly regard Holy Week as a fitting, sacred observance of our Savior's suffering and death. Please do everything possible to clear your schedule so that you might not only be able to take advantage of the public services offered at St Paul, but to spend time with your Lord in private devotions and prayers.

Communion Schedule – Holy Communion will next be offered, God willing, at our Maundy Thursday service on April 14th at 7pm, and then again on Sunday, April 24th.