

On The Right Path

Lord, give me the confidence in the power of your Gospel. Grant me clarity in understanding and proclaiming the truths of your Word. Amen.

Good morning to all here and watching at home.

John does not recount the life and works of Christ. Instead, his gospels tell us who Christ is. So, it makes sense that today's Gospel is John's version of the Christmas story. He sets out a sacred timeline, from the Word in the beginning to the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ, marking a new beginning, a new path. A path that calls for a reassessment of the past, a new road with eternal salvation as its destination.

Between now and Holy Week/Easter, we will recount the path, the arc of Christ's life here on earth, leaving us with a map for our own travels, a map that directs us on a path of grace, compassion, and mercy.

What will the arc of our lives be? Will we strive to emulate Christ on our own individual paths? To accomplish this, how can our inner lives navigate outside forces? How can we stay on the right path as time and circumstances tempt us to take detours along the way?

We have all been severely tested during these tumultuous times, our comforting routines upended. Our personal timelines and paths need much more of our attention to continue to live our lives as Christ intended.

The New Year is upon us, a perfect time for making resolutions. It is a time of renewed hope, to begin anew, a clean slate. It is a time for discernment, the ability to determine what serves you, and what does not. Discernment is a process of self-reflection, with the aid of prayer and guidance from the Lord, an opportunity to look inward

Over the next few days, consider your experiences over the past year. What were your joys? What situations caused you grief? Did your challenges break you or break you open? Try to discern God's will in the events that impacted you.

Our lives have been upended, but there is a silver lining. We always feel safe to stay where we are, with those things that we know, not to move out of our comfort zone. But the pandemic has changed all that.

I think that our current challenges, particularly the pandemic, have shed a light on what is truly important and what things are better left behind as they have little connection to God's purpose. Have we not all had an Epiphany, an insight into the essential meaning of what is truly important? Have our months of isolation caused us to look inward, to identify what we truly need to continue on our path to salvation? To borrow a GPS phrase, are we recalculating?

I have recently retired. All the plans I had for what to do with my free time were not possible due to the pandemic. As I am the type of person who likes to be busy it was, at first, a difficult situation for me as I had so many things mapped out. Instead, I have become more involved with the Episcopal Church in CT, through the Northwest Leadership Team, food drives, the Bishop Transition Committee and, as I am in front of you, being trained as a lay preacher. These things were not part of my initial plan, but I am glad I changed course as I find them very fulfilling.

You just never know what path your life will take, and it is good to be open to new things you never thought to consider.

This is the time of year when we promise ourselves to be better, to let go of those things that ultimately cause us to be less than we should be in God's eyes. To change one's ways takes courage as it makes us leave behind what we "know". It involves growing pains. But there is gain in that pain as it gives us another opportunity to travel in tandem with Christ.

Howard Thurman, theologian, and civil rights activist, said it best in his "Meditation of the Heart":

I will sing this day a new song unto Thee, O God.

The old song of my spirit has wearied itself out. The words belong to old experiences which once sprang fresh as water from a mountain crevice fed by melting snows. But my life has passed beyond to other levels. I demand of the old song that it meet the need of the present urgencies.

I will sing a new song. As difficult as it is, I must learn the new song that is capable of meeting the new need. I must fashion new words born of all the new growth of my life, my mind and my spirit. I must prepare for new melodies that have never been mine before, that all that is within me may lift my voice unto God. How I love the old familiarity of the wearied melody – how I shrink from the harsh discords of the new untried harmonies.

Teach me, O God, that I might learn the abandonment and enthusiasm of Jesus. The fresh new accent, the untried melody, to meet the need of the untried tomorrow. Thus, I may rejoice with each new day and delight my spirit in each fresh unfolding. I will sing, this day, a new song, unto Thee, O God.

I pray that you all enter the New Year with courage and renewed hope, and with the knowledge that the love of Christ is with you every step of the way.

Rely on him, and you will be able to stay on his path, where darkness can never get a foothold.

Amen.

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