



Sermon, September 17, 2017
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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

Sermon Series: Tending the Path
“What Is a Path?”

Scripture: Psalm 1 and Isaiah 62:10-12

Psalm 1

¹ Happy are those
 who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
 or sit in the seat of scoffers;
² but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and on his law they meditate day and night.
³ They are like trees
 planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
 and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.
⁴ The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the
judgment,
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶ for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish.

Isaiah 62:10-12

¹⁰ Go through, go through the gates,
 prepare the way for the people;
build up, build up the highway,
 clear it of stones,
 lift up an ensign over the peoples.
¹¹ The Lord has proclaimed
 to the end of the earth:
Say to daughter Zion,
 “See, your salvation comes;
his reward is with him,
 and his recompense before him.”
¹² They shall be called, “The Holy People,
 The Redeemed of the Lord”;
and you shall be called, “Sought Out,
 A City Not Forsaken.”

Recap of Last Week – We’ve Been Given a Path to Tend by Jesus, a Way

Last week, I talked about the fact that Jesus left behind a Way of living that was a way to the heart of Love itself. It was a Way of thinking, a Way of living fully and joyously, a Way of transforming human relationships, and a Way of spiritual and personal healing and expansion of consciousness. It encompassed body, mind, and soul. It kept you grounded on the earth, in the here and now at the same time it flooded you with the power of the Spirit and a vision of the Eternal. It transformed people into being the means whereby the prayer “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” was made real. This is what Jesus taught and equipped his followers to become and to do.

I also talked about the fact that we have been given this Way as a Life Path, and our task is to tend this Path, and to pass it on to future generations and to the world around us. Today, I want us to look more closely at what it means to have a Way, or a Path.

What Is a Way? – A Path on Which to Walk and a Manner of Walking

In the Book of Acts, Chapter 2, on the day of Pentecost, after the Holy Spirit came upon believers assembled in Jerusalem, Peter gives a sermon about the meaning of that gift of the Holy Spirit, and about Jesus Christ, the giver of the gift. He quotes from a Psalm of David that he says refers to Jesus: “You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence” (Acts 2:28; Psalm 16:11). Later on, in the ninth chapter of Acts, the first followers of Jesus were known as people of the Way.

The word I am using here, that is found in the Bible in so many places, is “Way,” and it has two meanings, both of which apply. The first is a path, a road, the actual traversal from Point A to Point B (rarely a straight line). The second meaning is the manner in which one travels on that path or road. You know, we sing to children, “this is the way we wash our clothes, wash our clothes...” etc. Both meanings of the “Way” are explored in today’s scripture readings.

Psalm Reading and Two Ways – of the Individual

Two ways are presented in Psalm 1, which we read responsively this morning: the way of the wicked and scoffers, and the way of the righteous and those who delight in the law of the LORD). It doesn’t say what those ways are, but what the effects and results of walking in each way. Those who walk in the way of the Lord prosper, because it is watched over and nurtured by the Lord.

Image of the fruit-bearing tree: If you want a tree to grow and flourish, you have to maintain the conditions necessary for growth such as access to adequate supply of water (not too much, not too little), good, fertile soil, protection from weather extremes. The same is true for our own growth as whole persons. It is also true for the growth of a whole and

healthy society. The path of delighting in God is designed and constituted in such a way that those conditions for personal and societal flourishing are present and are maximized.

Martin Buber

Martin Buber is one of the great religious and philosophical thinkers and writers of our century. He is particularly famous for his interpretation of Hasidic stories, “examining and explaining the basic tenets of a way of life which lies near the center of Judaism.” In his book, *The Way of Man: According to the Teaching of Hasidism*, Buber explains the centrality of searching the human heart in Hasidism as the the beginning of the way in (human) life; it is again and again “the beginning of a human way. But heart-searching is decisive only if it leads to the way” (p. 13). Hasidism teaches that each person has a way, or a path, that is unique for them.

(Buber, p. 16): “Every person born into this world represents something new, something that never existed before, something original and unique.... Every (person’s) foremost task is the actualization of his unique, unprecedented and never-recurring potentialities, and not the repetition of something that another, and be it even the greatest, has already achieved.” Buber then relates the famous quote of Rabbi Zusya: “In the world to come I shall not be asked, ‘why were you not Moses?’ I shall be asked: ‘Why were you not Zusya?’”

Isaiah Reading – The Communal and Social Way of Wholeness

The pathway of God’s wholeness and salvation requires preparation and tending. This means that those impediments in our lives and society that hinder, block, imperil, or are detrimental to the progress of that salvation must be removed and cleared away.

It is also a constructive process; building up a pathway. But always we must keep in mind that whatever we construct is meant to be a way, a means for God’s process and bearer of wholeness and salvation. The highway doesn’t exist to be a monument unto itself. It is only meant to serve as the means of transit and transport of God’s healing, wholeness, peace, and justice for the world.

Sermon Series: Tending the Path

“What Is a Path?”

There are times when the ways and roads we have so carefully constructed need to be abandoned. When I first moved to serve the church in Joseph, I had been in the community for just a few weeks when a flash flood upriver from our United Methodist Camp sped down the mountainside and wiped out much of the Boy Scout Camp to the south. I went by the camp a few days later to survey the damage. I was struck by the presence of a suspension bridge sitting out in the middle of nothing. That bridge apparently had been carefully built by volunteers and scouts across the Wallowa River, providing the means to go from the parking lot to the rest of the camp. When the flash flood hit, it altered the course of the river, carved out a new channel, and left the bridge high and dry, as it were. It no longer connected the parking lot to the camp. There are times when the ways of doing things, the structured we build, the organizational systems we piece together are like that bridge: left high and dry when the course of the culture around us changes.

Summing It Up

A “Path” or, better, a “Way” is not only a route in life that one takes, but it is also the manner in which one travels upon that path and through life. A Way provides us with the means to discern the layout of the terrain before us, the hazards along the way, enjoyment of the journey, and the personal resources to learn from the journey. A Way provides us with the means and skills to heal from injuries along the way, safe instructions for perilous crossings and encounters, and guidelines for cultivating companions and comrades for the adventure. And, of course, all our little ways are all part of a larger flow of human civilization and culture that has its own Path of growth, development, and progress. We are all a part of clearing out that Path so that humanity and the rest of creation can arrive at a place of wholeness and health, of justice and sustainability.

Question for Reflection

Describe for yourself the most significant parts of your Way in the world. In what ways does the Way of Jesus interact with your Way?