

“The Way of the Lord”

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**Sunday, February 28, 2016
Third Sunday in Lent**

Readings from Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 and Isaiah 55:1-9

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.” We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call people that you do not know, and people that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:1-9

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations and our faith to you and to the power of your Holy Spirit. I pray that you would take the words we carry within, the words that we have offered in song and in prayer, the words that we have heard read from sacred scripture and the words that you have laid upon my heart this morning to share. Touch, bless and transform all of these into the living word, the word of Jesus Christ our Lord. And let that word do its work within us, among us and through us out into a

hurting and broken world. We ask this in Christ's faithful name. Amen.

Every now and then when Karen or I or Eric or whomever is preaching, we use a rhetorical device in order to sort of get into a topic--something along the lines of "You know, I was having a conversation with a friend this week and they asked me specifically about this obscure passage".... and off we go. Because we are not sure sometimes how to get into something. Sometimes I employ those devices because they work. I get to preach, you get to hear and we're kinda right there. I don't have one of those today. I don't have a made up introduction into the topic. I have for you the real deal.

For years, I don't know about all of you, but for years I have been trying to figure out why my evangelical brothers and sisters in the faith talk about God and Jesus and salvation and mission and witness and evangelism and grace and mercy and love and do not mean any of the things that I mean when I say those words. I have talked to friends who are more conservative than I am in the faith, and we're saying the same key words but we mean something so amazingly different. I've lost a friend because of this difference and maybe you are in a similar situation...you have a friend or a loved one who you find to be a little more conservative than you and you're not quite sure, like "what is going on? How did we get this way?"

This week for the first time the light bulb, the big one, went ka-chink and lit up. And it dawned on me that the reason that we speak the same words but mean something completely different is that for my evangelical brothers and sisters the entire emphasis of our faith is on the cross, or the main emphasis. The cross represents the most significant thing that Jesus Christ did. He was nailed to the cross, paid the price for our sins with his blood and with his life and he died on that cross so that we might have eternal life forever. That is the emphasis. And everything gets seen through that lens. That's not a bad lens to have, but it is a lens that makes everything look like something that needs to be fixed or saved. There is evil and sin and Jesus needs to claim it and redeem it and you need to make sure you're right with God.

And the big ka-chink was that for us, and I'll just say me, but I'm hoping for us, the emphasis is not way back here just over the cross, just focused on Jesus and his saving work there, but for us the emphasis is somewhere about here, between the cross and the table. And what dawned on me was that when I think of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ, I think about Christ leaving heaven and laying aside every gift and coming to the earth and being one of us. I think about Jesus in John 2 turning water into wine, a lot of wine, so that the people gathered could continue to celebrate and have fellowship and communion with each other, so that the party could literally go on. When Jesus took that bread at the last supper, and said "Do this in remembrance of me," and broke that bread and gave it to his disciples and gave it to us, was he just referring to his work on the cross or was he reminding them and us, "I turned water into wine so that you all could continue to party and enjoy fellowship with each other." When Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me," was he talking just about being nailed to that cross for the price of the sin of all of creation? Or was he also saying, "Remember when the 5000 were hungry? And everybody had their share kind of squirreled away in their pockets or wrapped up in their cloak, afraid to share? And then that darned little kid showed up. He walked up and unraveled his thing and said, 'Hey, guess what I found? Five loaves and two fish.'" And Jesus took it, blessed it, broke it, gave it to the disciples. They gave it to everyone and as they ate they kind of said, "Wait a minute, maybe I can share, too."

What I've come to realize is that there are times in our Christian journey when we are Christo-centric--centered on Christ--and that centering is right upon the cross. But there are also times on our journey with Christ when we center ourselves here in this sacrament that says to us the most important thing to remember is that God sets the table and eats with all the sinners that will come. So for us to be Christian, the first and most important thing to remember is that its about welcoming others to a common experience--a meal that

symbolically for us is the presence of God among us and the presence of heaven on earth. Because the amazing thing about this meal is you did not pay a dollar to eat this meal. Whether you are rich or poor, you get to eat. Whether you are hungry or full, you get to eat. Whether you are afraid or sure, you get to eat. Because God's blessing and gift to us is here--Jesus saying, "Here I am, take it all."

The emphasis for us at times is back there (indicating the cross) and at times it is here (the communion table). And when it is here, it changes what we think about what it means for us to be followers. Coffee with your friend becomes a sacred act if the emphasis is here. A quiet meal with a loved one becomes a sacred act if the emphasis is here. If the emphasis is always there, then it could be just an extravagance or a selfishness or a waste of time or money or resources. But if the emphasis is here, it becomes something different, because at this table and through the act of communion and Jesus' self-giving and his incarnation, Jesus does something unbelievable. He hallows that which is ordinary and makes it sacred. Bread, wine, fish, but most importantly fellowship among people, without regard to their status, purity or appropriateness. We say it every time we have communion, "This is the Lord's supper and all are welcome." We are welcome because God gave of himself through Christ, Christ gives of himself through bread and cup and we get to receive this blessing without being worthy at all. And then the neat part is, we get to experience that grace, have it change how we think about ourselves and the world, and we get to carry that grace out into the world.

I did have a real conversation with someone--I'm not sure if they are here today--I'll find out at the end of the service when they say, "Hey, that was my story" -- who talked to me about all of us going out into the world and bearing witness to our faith, of talking to people and engaging them in matters of the faith. It dawned on me as I was thinking about even that question, if we go out with the emphasis only there, then we are asking people, "Are you saved?" But if we go out with the emphasis up here, we are asking people, "Hey, what's your name? What do you do? How's it going?" We share stories about common life, our life, and faith and things that are happening here in this church. We don't have to explain Jesus, we just need to be nice and show up and have a conversation. Sometimes when we have those sorts of encounters, when we are able to talk about, "Well, at my church we talk about how everyone is welcome" or "At my church we learn that following Christ is broader than just the cross." Sometimes when you have those conversations with people who need to hear about that stuff, they go "(gasp) what? Where is that?" And they get drawn in.

Yesterday morning I found myself at St. Louis Honda in need of a new vehicle. My wife, who hates car negotiating was not present. At about 2 o'clock with my stomach rumbling and my wife by my side, the message came, "Would Mr. and Mrs. Holyan please report to the document security room." And I thought, finally, sign on the X and get out of here. So we go in, we sit down. A nice young man is there and he is chatty, chatty, chatty, chatty, chatty, chatty, and I'm like "Let's go." Chatty, chatty, chatty and he asks "What are you going to do when you're done?" "I'm going to lunch." "Do you like brisket?" "Uh huh." "Do you like barbecue stuff like barbecued chicken and turkey?" "Yeah." "You have got to go to Sugar Fire, they have a new store in Fenton, right off 141 and 44, and it's amazing and they have this sauce that is the sweetest thing ever. You begin to eat and you're like 'oh, my gosh' and then it just builds and builds and then it gets spicy and spicy and you just keep eating and eating and eating and oh, my gosh." Guess where Jani and I went for lunch yesterday?

That guy was the best evangelist I've ever encountered. He just started talking about something that was good. And he shared his story and we got sucked in and we got blessed. My hope is that this can be that for us. It's not Sugar Fire and it's not barbecue sauce, it's something much more significant. This is the way that God reaches out to the world and our job is simply to partake and then share the invitation with everyone, so that they, too, can be blessed. Amen.