

Psalm 25:1-10 | 1st Sunday in Lent | February 18, 2018
Pastor Nick Shults | St. Mark Lutheran Church | Sunnyvale, CA

Focus: God turns us from our own sinful ways and guides us in *His* ways which are good and trustworthy.

Function: That my hearers would pray with the psalmist, “Show me Your ways, teach me Your paths, Guide me in Your Truth...”

ME →

I’m not sure if I get this talent from my mom’s side or my dad’s side, but I’m really good at getting lost. Misreading maps, taking wrong turns, you name it I can do it. I was traveling, once, with a friend of mine and we were in Sorrento, Italy and one night we were trying to find our way back to the hostel and for some reason, even the two of us combined, couldn’t figure out for the life of us where we were on the map and what we needed to do to get back. To make matters worse we were racing the clock as the hostel had a curfew at which point they locked the doors. As the pressure and frustration mounted we just got more and more lost.

Now, this isn’t a talent I’ve acquired recently...it’s been with me all my life. In high school a friend and I were hanging out in downtown Portland and had neglected to remember the cross streets of the parking garage where we had parked our car. And all the parking garages in Portland look exactly the same. We must have looked for an hour or more...trying to find our car.

Oh, and there was that time my sister and I took our 1972 VW beetle for a drive in the country so she could get some good landscape shots for her photography class. I guess we were more concerned about finding the right location that we weren’t really paying much attention to where, exactly, we were going and with a gas gauge quickly approaching zero, we were forced to stop and ask for directions only to find out that we were in a town that wasn’t remotely close to where we thought we were.

WE →

In this season of Lent, which we kicked off on Ash Wednesday, we take an extended time of 40 days to repent. That is, we take some time to acknowledge our sin, to recognize that that being lost isn’t just a condition of your directionally challenged pastor. No, we all have wandered off in a myriad of different directions. Rather than follow Christ in the direction that he would have us walk, we have gone off on our own. We have set our eyes on what *we* think is good without having sought the will of God. We have relied solely on our own reason and strength, rather than on Christ.

This looks different for each of us but basically it boils down to priorities. What things do we place at the top of the heap in terms of our priorities in life? Is it our work? Is it making as much money as possible in Silicon Valley before taking off for someplace a little cheaper? Is it our friends? Is it going out? Is it playing sports? Is it getting into the best college possible?

God has given us many things to do in this life. Our work, our family, our friends, physical activity. All of these are great gifts of God. But the question for this morning is this: have these

things become gods unto themselves in our lives? Have we wandered off by replacing our Creator God with one of these *creations* of God? Have we desired so much to enjoy the things of creation that we have simply forgotten the Creator?

Isaiah writes in Is 53:6, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way...” We have *all* gone astray. Each and every one of us has wandered off from God’s fold. Whether it was a time in our life when we talked away from the faith altogether or now when we seek to simply make our own way in life. We have chosen to pursue the finite and temporal things rather than the things of God. Author Thomas Kelly put it this way, “People nowadays take *time* far more seriously than *eternity*.”

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I was reading a story the other day about an Olympic figure skater from the United States. This guy, he’s only 18 years old, was supposed to be an up and coming star. The next great Olympic athlete from the US. He’s been training since he was 3 years old...that’s when he started skating. From the time he was 10 he had his eyes on these Olympics that are taking place right now in South Korea. This was supposed to be his coming out party; the day that he showed the entire world what he could do.

If you’ve been watching the Olympics, You probably know what happened his first time out on the ice. He bombed. This thing he had been anticipating for eight years, his life goal and mission...it finally came and he fell flat. He came close to making up for it later, but here’s the point.

I don’t know this guy and I don’t know if he is a man of faith or not. But consider this. He, like every other athlete competing in the Olympics, and like many of us in this room, had set a path for himself. For him, that included one thing and one thing only: being an Olympic champion. This is what he has dedicated his life to, only to reach this point and fail. But consider this also. What if he had won? He would have been an olympic champion. That sounds pretty nice in the short-term but what about eternity? How important does it become?

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You see, these things that we have set up as our priorities in life: work or sports or finances or things or corporate success, they are all temporary. Yet they have lured us into following them down a path that simply leads nowhere. Indeed, it only leads to sin and death.

This is the whole reason for the season of Lent. Of course Lent isn’t commanded of us in the Bible but, just as the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years and Jesus was tempted in the desert for 40 days, we also take 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter to allow God to bring us back to Himself and His ways and paths for our lives. As we prepare to celebrate Easter, we take 40 days to turn away from the ways in which our priorities have gone awry and turn back to God.

GOD →

On Ash Wednesday we began our midweek Lenten sermon series titled “The Gospel in Seven Words”. During our midweek services and into Holy Week we’re going to work together to

construct biblically faithful confessions of our faith in Jesus Christ. As we do that on the Wednesdays in Lent, each *Sunday* during Lent we're going to take a look at the Psalm which is appointed for each weekend during the season. So as we reflect on our sinful condition and repent of that sin, these Psalms, the prayers written thousands of years ago, will become our prayers as well.

In the psalm that we read responsively together this morning, Psalm 25:1-10, we read of a longing. It's a longing of the psalmist, King David, to offer his whole life to God. "To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul". To do this means to know God's ways...to humble himself before God and be instructed by Him.

The psalmist desires to offer his whole life to God because in God alone does he find salvation. Only God offers steadfast, unflinching love. See, it's clear that the psalmist hasn't perfected the art of walking in the ways of God. He has failed, just like us, over and over again. He has wandered off on his own, leaving God behind. Verse 7 makes this clear. David, the writer of the psalm, has sinned. But in God he finds forgiveness. In God he finds that never failing, steadfast love that is not dependant on human perfection. Rather, God's love for his people is an act of mercy and grace.

So David knows that, despite his sinfulness, God welcomes him back. More than that, God longs to teach and instruct him.

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As we begin our lenten journey, this prayer of David can be our prayer too. As we recognize our sin, as we recognize the fact that time and time again we wander off, and seek after our own desires, we know that God has come to welcome us back. He has come to forgive us...he has come to teach and guide us.

It's instructive for us that Jesus came as a humble teacher. Bringing God's rule and reign to earth included teaching the people, instructing them in the way of the Lord. As we saw throughout the season of Epiphany, God's word is authoritative and has the power to change and transform lives. And we read in the Gospels that Jesus didn't hold this word back, but rather he had compassion on the crowds that followed him and so He *teaches* them. Why? Because they were like sheep without a shepherd. They were lost. Led astray by their own sinful desires, and lacking leaders who would point them to God's goodness and grace.

So when Jesus goes to the cross for the sins of the world, He doesn't cease to teach. There on the cross Jesus demonstrates and reveals the divine character of God. This God is not one who abandons his lost sheep. No, this God is the one who comes after his sheep.

In Matthew 18:12-14 Jesus says to his disciples,

¹² What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine

that never went astray. ¹⁴ So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

That passage from Isaiah that I quoted for you earlier, about how we like sheep have gone astray? That passage is from a larger section in Isaiah on the Suffering Servant, Isaiah's prophecy of the coming Christ. The full verse continues on:

All we like sheep have gone astray we have turned - everyone - to his own way and the Lord has laid on Him (that is, Christ) the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth...

On Good Friday, as Jesus is crucified, he fulfills for us Psalm 25. Indeed, Jesus teaches us the way and the truth of God. He instructs us in the grace and mercy of God by running after us, each and every one of us, who have gone astray. All of us who have pursued our own agendas, all of us who have ignored all that God desires to give us. Jesus comes after us. He comes to teach us, yes. To show us how to live. But more than that, he comes to die and rise for us. In his steadfast, unmovable, unshakable love, to bring us back to himself.

YOU →

Lent, therefore, is the time we use to look up from our busy lives and realize that we have wandered off. We have strayed from the fold and have sought after other gods and pursued that things that we ought not. Lent us the time when we stop and look. When we taste and see that the Lord is good. He *alone* is good.

This Lent Christ is calling you. He's calling you to look around and notice those ways in which you have failed to walk in his ways. To notice those times when you prioritized what is temporal over what is eternal. But he's not calling you to notice these things merely to make you feel guilty or like a failure. He's calling you to notice these things because he wants to offer you his forgiveness. He wants to offer you His grace. And he wants to teach you. He wants to show you what it means to rely on his infinite mercy and steadfast love.

One tool that we are using this Lent is a weekly email devotion that points us back to Jesus. It's based on our midweek theme, "The Gospel in Seven Words" and the whole goal is to weekly point us back to Jesus and what He has done for us by his suffering, death, and resurrection.

US →

As a church family, we can also continue to pray this prayer for our communal life as well. "Make me to know *your* ways...teach me *your* paths...lead me in *your* truths and teach me...".

As a church we already know our calling, don't we? We already know the path that God has set us on and why we exist. Why do we exist? To make disciples of all nations. That's Christ's calling for the church.

So how can we be faithful proclaimers of the Gospel in this community?

I am really excited about our Lenten midweek sermon series, “The Gospel in Seven Words”. Already many of you have come up with your own summaries of the Gospel using only seven words which is awesome! We’re only one week into it and already many have been thinking about how to succinctly summarize the Gospel! This coming Wednesday we’ll talk a little more in depth about some of the necessary pieces of a faithful proclamation of the Gospel so we can continue to fine-tune those that we have come up with already.

But imagine...imagine if each of us could speak clearly and concisely about the work of God in Christ in our lives? And could do so using the plethora of language and images that the Bible uses to talk about the work of Jesus in this world?

Imagine how many lives would be touched when each of us is prepared to give a reason for the hope that we have in Jesus? Imagine the comfort and hope God, through us, His people, can spread throughout this city?

So this Lent, I urge you to make our midweek services a priority in your life. Take some time to slow down your busy life, spend an hour eating with one another, and hearing from God’s word. God comes to us in his Word, through scripture and singing and preaching and conversation...he comes to teach us and guide us in His ways as we travel together through this life. Amen.