

## **“Teach me your paths”**

### **Psalm 25:1-10**

**SLIDE #1– 2 KIDS** When Danette and I moved to Ypsilanti, Michigan for our year of internship. When we moved to Rolette, N.D. for our first call, moved to Fargo, N.D. for our second call, moved to Beatrice, NE. for our third call, and moved to Parma Heights, OH. for our fourth call, one of the first things I did was buy a book map of the town (hold one up) so I could more easily find parishioner’s homes, hospitals, and other important places. Since living here, a GPS has taken the place of my maps much to the delight of my wife.

Before GPS, when we would go on vacations, we would go to AAA and pick up a “trip tic” that Danette would attempt to interpret while I drove. The trip tic was a huge improvement over the old fold up state maps or the atlas of the U.S. Danette has always struggled with reading maps in a timely manner. So, she was delighted to turn that task over the GPS woman who understood the difference between east and west! Our travel time became much more relaxed.

**SLIDE #1A – WHITE VAN** Except for the time when the motor blew in our 1969 Ford van when traveling from North Dakota to Ohio. Fortunately, it lasted till we were in Ohio and on I-80. We had it towed to Valley City, thank you AAA, where my brother rebuilt the motor in the 2 weeks we were here. My brother has very different talents than I do.

When I was growing up in the woods near Valley City, my Dad raised coonhounds, black and tans and walkers. He would find his way through the woods with a carbon light on his hat and a compass following the barking of the dogs trailing and then treeing a coon. I quickly

learned its easy to get lost in the woods at night which motivated me to keep up with him until I had mastered his directional skills so we could split up in pursuing our prey.

All of this is a preamble to our look at Psalm 25, where the psalmist prays, **SLIDE #2** [“Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.”] In effect, the psalmist is asking God to help him with a sense of spiritual direction and a cognitive map that shows him the Lord’s ways and paths. Or to use a modern metaphor, the psalmist is praying for a spiritual GPS.

That’s an especially apropos prayer for this season of Lent.

Traveling God’s path implies movement and direction, a response to God’s word, and a way of living that pleases God. In the Psalms, “path” often refers to the kind of conduct prescribed by the Scripture, especially in the laws of Moses. The Mosaic laws and the books containing them, the first five books of the Bible, were called the Torah. The basic meaning of Torah, is not “rules,” but “instruction.” Thus, by praying, “Make known to me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth ...” the psalmist is asking for instruction in traveling God’s way.

Psalm 25 tells us specific things about the path to God.

First, it tells us that the godly path is not necessarily a way that we know intuitively. When the psalmist prays, in verse 4, “Make me to know your ways ... teach me your paths,” he seems to be acknowledging that the path of the Lord is not necessarily obvious, but rather a direction that needs to be studied out, discerned, and discovered. Sometimes, we even learn about God’s path when we have walked too far on another trail and discovered that it leads to trouble. Beating a hasty retreat, we finally call out to God for direction, and we encounter Jesus.

Second, the psalmist acknowledges that the Lord's way is a path *sinner*s are invited to walk: **SLIDE #3** ["God ... instructs sinners in the way,"] the psalmist says in verse 8.

And third, the psalmist acknowledges in verse 10 that all the ways of God are characterized by steadfast love and faithfulness for those who follow his instruction. One thing the psalmist is sure about: The way of the Lord is a good way.

In Psalm 25, of course, the writer is speaking of the instruction provided by a loving God so that his human creatures can find the right direction in this confusing world. The psalmist opens by praying, **SLIDE #4** ["To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul" (v. 1).] Clearly the psalmist knew where the right path started.

In his book about inner navigation, Erik Jonsson touts the advantages of the cognitive map, noting that it "is tailor made for us, showing only what we need to see." In contrast, "a street map," says Jonsson, "shows mostly what we don't need, and it takes quite a bit of practice in map reading to use it efficiently, to get past the wealth of useless information and find what one actually needs."

Street maps and their intellectual equivalent — general knowledge — have their place, of course, and we draw from our general knowledge in living our lives every day. But the way of the Lord is a special application of knowledge guided by the Holy Spirit. Thus, we need God's help to develop our cognitive sense and orientation on God's path.

So how do we do that? Here are three ways:

**SLIDE #5** [**First, make it a matter of prayer.**] "To pray is to change," says Richard Foster, who has written extensively about the spiritual practices that help us grow. "Prayer is the central avenue God uses to change us," Foster adds. In so saying, he answers the question

about why we should pray when God already knows our needs. We should pray because God uses prayer to change us. In fact, Foster says: “If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives.”

And in Psalm 25, the psalmist even gives us some words to use in these prayers: **SLIDE #6** [“Make known to me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth ...” ]

If you find praying difficult — and a great many of us do — you might try this during Lent: Spend some time reading and praying the prayers others have written. You might, for example, use “Christ in Our Home”. Divinity receives a box full of these devotionals every 3 months written by pastors and lay persons from Lutheran churches across the U.S.

**SLIDE #7 – CHRIST IN OUR HOME COVER** Each person writes a daily devotional for 2 weeks so there are 6 writers for each 3-month devotional. Each devotion begins with a scripture reading followed by a devotion, a prayer, a prayer concern, and scripture readings to look up in your Bible for that day. Here is the devotion for today . . .

Sunday, February 21

Mark 1:9-15

### **First Sunday in Lent**

**And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. (v. 12)**

Baptisms are among the most special events of the Christian experience. Whatever the age of the one being baptized, the joy shared in the community of faith is holy and deep. Yet baptism, for us as for Jesus, marks not the culmination of a faith journey but the beginning. And parts of that journey will not be joyful.

Today we're reminded that right after his baptism, Jesus was "driven" into the wilderness. So perhaps are we as we begin the Lenten journey. And so are we at other times in life. Yet God does not call us to live in the wilderness to pass a test and prove our devotion so much as to fully know what it means to trust God's promises made in baptism. If the baptismal covenant were only for good times and happy days, it wouldn't mean much. But even—and especially—amid our trials, God claims us, shelters, and guides us, strengthens, and sanctifies us. In the wildernesses of life, we learn firsthand what God proclaimed in our baptism: "You are my beloved child."

**God, help us find joy in your presence as we journey in the wildernesses of life.**

**Amen.**

*Prayer concern: Courage for those experiencing a wilderness time*

**First**, our quest for a spiritual map involves prayer.

**SLIDE #8** [Second, make your quest for a spiritual cognitive map a matter of **Scripture reading.**] During Lent, select a passage each day of no more than 10-12 verses from the gospels, epistles, or psalms. Read it not to focus on what the passage meant to the original audience, but what God might say through it to you. As you read, notice if a word, phrase, or verse speaks to you, perhaps in light of your life right now. If so, pause and savor the insight, feeling or understanding, and realize that what you've just noticed is likely a *landmark* on the inner journey, something that will help you find the Lord's way in the future as well. Then go back and read the passage again because it will have a fuller meaning. Pause again and note what happened. Follow with prayer. This exercise will help your spiritual way-finding skills, as

one of the psalms tells us: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

**SLIDE #9** [Third, this being Lent, consider how fasting might help you in your spiritual orientation.] As you probably know, there are several levels of fasting. You can go without all food (but not water) for a set period or you can do a partial fast, perhaps omitting a single meal one day a week, with many other possibilities in between. Whatever level you choose, the point is to consider how the fast helps you focus on matters (besides food!) that you might not have focused on otherwise ... to help you hear things from God you might not have otherwise heard.

If you want to improve your ability to find your way on the streets and highways these days, all you need is a GPS or cell phone.

But for finding the Lord’s path, it’s hard to beat prayer, Bible-reading and Lenten fasting.

May the peace of God . . .

#326 – Bless Now, O God, the Journey