

Beware the Sidetrack

Sermon, October 26th, 2025

I'm sticking to our theme of the past few weeks, which is "we live in this world but we are not of this world."

If you have a bulletin, take note of the picture. It's a picture of a RR track. The main line heads straight ahead, but there are two sidetracks, one going to the right and one going to the left. Our lives are like a train journey. The main track represents God's perfect will and purpose for our lives, both individually and as a church – a direct path toward a specific destination. There is no guarantee that this track will always be clear and easy, but it is always true and ultimately good. The conductor is God, and He has a perfect itinerary for our lives, leading us by the Holy Spirit and our faith in Jesus Christ, toward a purpose-filled journey here on earth, and ultimately eternal life with Him. But, beware the sidetrack!!

My message today is aimed at those of us who confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior and are in fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. However, I believe the way in which we interact with each other, and the practices we put into place within these walls to ensure we don't get off track, will naturally spill out into the world outside these walls in our encounters with people in our families and the community.

The sidetracks represent distractions. Some distractions are subtle, a quiet, almost imperceptible turn. They may seem harmless, but they deviate us from our priorities. Some distractions slow us down. Our attention to other concerns take residence in our heads, and we give more thought to the distraction than to the Gospel and our spiritual growth. The sidetrack must wait for clearance from the conductor to rejoin the main line. This represents the season of waiting and repentance we face when we realize we've been sidetracked and need to get back on the main track.

I will confess I have been on a sidetrack more than once. It is extremely easy now with the political division, a tough economy, contentious school board races, you name it! These are things we feel passionate about, and these are things that

matter! It is important to be an informed, active citizen. However, being a citizen of the Local, County, State and national governments is not our first priority. We live here, but our first citizenship is in Heaven. Our first and only true priority is to be united in Christ, pursuing God's will for us. I often struggle with finding balance in this, and I imagine I'm not alone in that.

So how do we stay on track? One way is to recognize that our brothers and sisters in Christ are family. Not one of us is perfect, but we are still family. Ephesians 4:2-3 says, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity and bond of peace." I believe that describes a healthy family. I'd like to share a devotional I wrote back in 2020. Its entitled "The Unity and Bond of Peace."

<https://epcdevotionals.blogspot.com/2020/04/the-unity-and-bond-of-peace.html>

Unity is sometimes easier said than accomplished. My devotion was written on Easter when we are all praising God and thanking Him for His gift of Jesus and the joy of the Resurrection. But what about mid-January? There are times when I think its important to shift our focus. For example, and this seems off topic, but bear with me:

Take climate change. We spend an inordinate amount of time and energy arguing about whether or not it is real, and if so, what or who causes it? We hold strong opinions and whip out scientific evidence supporting all conclusions – depending on your particular belief about it. Beware the sidetrack! What if, instead, we all focused on clean air. Is there anyone who doesn't want our air to be clean?? What, then if we worked together to ensure we all have clean air – whether that is accomplished by lessening our use of fossil fuel, or using solar or wind power, or making automobiles and factories run cleaner, or any other ideas that may work. The result would most likely be cleaner air. It wouldn't matter at all if Climate Change is real or not or who is to blame – we would have more sources of energy, and cleaner air. I just don't see a down side, and we could stop wasting time and energy arguing about it!

If we strive to be united in Christ, tackling each problem, or project, or opportunity for growth, bathed in prayer, believing that, as described in our Scripture reading from Ephesians, there is one body, and one Spirit, just as we are called to one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all, we will surely stay on track, and our differences will not matter at all! There is no down side to that!

This is all great, but what if anger or criticism creeps into our midst. How should we handle it when we can't agree? I found an article on the Newspring website that offers an observation. It reads,

"Criticism is a part of life, but don't let this discourage you. Constructive criticism is a valuable tool for those who are helping us follow Jesus and do better work. However, antagonistic critics don't often want a civil discussion; they usually want to cause trouble or feel they have the upper hand in a situation. Remind yourself the best response is not to react with hurt feelings or a quick temper, but with love.

The most powerful way to interact with someone opposing you is to express radical kindness. Jesus even tells us, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in Heaven." Matthew 5:44-45. Jesus does not need our defense, but He has asked us to love others no matter what. Don't be distracted by those who seek to pull you off course. Your steadfast love in the midst of criticism may be your greatest witness. To say politics have been front and center is an understatement. With name calling coming from both sides, and blame being thrown around, its easy to get lost in all the noise – to get sidetracked. While we're trying to keep up with the latest opinions and insults, we tend to neglect the things that deserve our attention most. Colossians 3:2 says, 'Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.'

When followers of Jesus are consumed by political scuffles, we lose sight of who we are and what we're meant to do. The church's mission is to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20)

Political unrest and a myriad of other issues can pull us away from that mission by causing us to confuse our own version of good news with the good news about Jesus. Don't get caught up in what Christians SHOULD believe or how Christians SHOULD vote. Satan seeks to divide, but Jesus seeks to unite.

If another person insists on bringing up how a church's beliefs don't line up with their own, listen quietly, then point the conversation back to Jesus. Don't allow yourself to go down that sidetrack!"

(<https://epcdevotionals.blogspot.com/search?q=Distraction>)

I'm closing my message today with an excerpt from Winnie the Pooh.

"Snow fell softly all around, quieting the world into stillness. Eeyore stood with his head low, the night pressing heavily on his shoulders. Pooh, noticing the weight in his friend's eyes, gently placed a small glowing heart upon the snow between them. Its warmth spread just enough to push back the cold, and Eeyore looked at it with the faintest spark of wonder. "Even the darkest nights, Pooh said softly, cannot last forever. The sun always finds its way back, even if it takes a little time."

Eeyore sighed, but it was not quite the same heavy sigh as before – it carried a hint of relief. "I suppose, he muttered, If one can't believe in the sun, one can at least believe in a friend who does." Pooh smiled and nodded, because sometimes hope needs a little help carrying itself through the night. And there, beneath the falling snow, the two of them stood together, holding onto the gentle truth that light always returns – and until it does, love is enough to keep the dark a little less lonely."

Let's be like Winnie the Pooh, reminding each other that Jesus is the truth and the light, and God is love. If we hold to Him and His word we will never be caught on a sidetrack!

Amen!

