

Sermon Christmas Eve 2018
Straight Paths – Rev. Markus Wegenast

Mark 1:1-3

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

²As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,

who will prepare your way;

³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight,’”

Luke 2:13f

¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

1)

Have you ever tried to walk in a straight line with your eyes closed?! Apparently it's humanly impossible. You can do it for a while, but eventually you'll walk crooked. A German scientist did a whole bunch of research on it, blindfolded an array of test subjects just to find out that not one was capable of walking straight. It has nothing to do with the amount of eggnog you've had. There is just something about our inner sense of orientation that prohibits walking a straight path – we can't do it, not unless we have help, like fixing our eyes on a target.

You should try it sometime - but please do it safely! I went to our church gym in the basement one afternoon and I tried it – I really hope nobody saw me!

Humans can't walk straight paths – not on their own – not without help. Hm! I can sense the disappointment in the room. You must feel very, very disillusioned right now. I can almost hear your disenchanted thoughts right now: “Really, humans can't walk straight? What an inadequate species we are!”

Jokes aside, I'm pretty confident that each and every one of us can handle this news about human biology. But what if we start taking this as an analogy for human life in general? What if there is something in our human nature that keeps making us **act** in crooked ways?

It's probably not a coincidence that throughout the Bible the language of walking in straight paths is used to describe a good and honest life. And throughout the Bible we see that people struggle living good and honest lives. People try, but they fail. It seems like that in the same way we need help to walk physically straight we also need help when it comes to living good and godly lives.

According to the Christmas story, God gave us this help. He was not willing to leave us hanging in our efforts to try to walk straight paths. Out of his love for us, God sent us a savior that helps us to do what we cannot do on our own: Living a straight paths life.

Jesus Christ who was born under very crooked circumstances in a stable, is the help you and I need to fix our eyes on so we don't attempt to walk straight through this world with a blindfold over our eyes. We can't walk straight then – we need to take the blindfolds off and walk toward the light of Christmas & Easter, fix our eyes on the one who is the savior of the world.

He loves to teach us how to walk straight, he loves to take us by the hand. But we shouldn't expect that it is a quick fix and easy process...

2)

Pat is a 55 year old woman. For the most part she is a pleasant and happy person. She is kind and tries to live a responsible life as good as she can. It's just... it's just when it comes to certain subjects about society and politics that she gets uneasy. Sometimes she wonders if she should stop watching TV because it often makes her mad. And now the holidays are coming. That means family gatherings. Ah, she doesn't know why this is so hard for her – but when certain members of her family start talking politics, she has a hard time staying pleasant.

Last year's Christmas wasn't good. It started at dinner already. Her sisters kept bashing the candidate she voted for. Pat couldn't stop thinking: 'What gives them the right to judge me for how I feel about life and politics?'

Pat knew something bad was going to happen. She had such high hopes. She was trying hard to prepare herself for the season to be kind and understanding.

But her sisters just kept pushing exactly those buttons that make Pat snap. She lashed out against her sisters with a speech of rage and words that were so un-Christmassy that she was shocked herself. All in front of the old nativity scene her mom so lovingly set up. She felt baby Jesus was just staring at her.

Christmas 2017 was not good! And the worst thing is, she is nervous that it will happen again this year...

Do you feel that there is a Pat in you too? For you it may not be lashing out, for you it may be something entirely different that makes it hard to walk the straight, righteous paths of living. What are the areas in your life where you feel you walk blind and get off the straight paths?

Don't beat yourself up. But also: don't quit! Don't quit keeping your eyes fixed on the savior that God sent you. Keep reaching for the help your savior is so thrilled to give you. Don't quit! When you get off the paths, keep getting back on and chase for the goal...

3)

What is that goal? I'd be curious: What does it *look* like for you to take that anthropological blindfold off and fix your eyes on Jesus?

Walking with the help of Jesus does not mean that we all run individual races toward the grand finish line of life. Walking straight with the help of Jesus means to truly walk with each other. Walking with Jesus is not just an individual journey, it is a journey that involves others!

When you realize that you are not alone in your attempt to walk straight paths you start seeing others around you with the same goal. And you know what? You will start learning something from them, something you would maybe never discover on your own. Jesus brings us together on our life paths, he helps us to love one another. “Another.” Another has “other” in it!

Life has it that we are always surrounded by others. And we can’t manipulate others to be the way we want them to be. But we can manipulate ourselves and learn patience. We can be aware of our own shortcomings and our own crookedness - it will help us to be forgiving toward others that are crooked.

I think throughout our lives we are tempted to keep putting our blindfolds back on because we don’t want to face all of life’s realities – but with a blindfold we can’t see Jesus and we can’t see our neighbors and learn something from their experience with Jesus. Because here is the thing: According to the Bible Jesus is the savior to all people, and it would go against the universality of his coming to think that he is not somehow present in each of his creations.

When you look for Jesus in another person you learn a completely new way of compassion.

This is Pat’s *hope* for this Christmas. She knows she will be tempted to be rude again, but she won’t just quit. She will walk with her savior into the next family gathering and try to look for her savior in all the people present there. She doesn’t know if she’ll succeed walking straight paths, but she will try – again, with Jesus.

What do you have to try this Christmas? Which *crookedness* do you feel keeps displaying in your life because you keep trying to be good on your own without the help of Jesus? What does it *look like* for you to stop wearing a blindfold and ask Jesus to come to your help as your savior? Will you do it?

I have little doubt heaven will open up once again and heavenly host will sing: “Glory to God in heaven for someone on earth has found his favor and lives out the very peace that this world so bitterly needs.” Amen.