

April 30, 2023

2 John 4; Acts 2:42-47; and John 10:1-10

# “Which Way Will You Go?”

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*2 John 4 - "I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father."*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ and my dear Junior Confirmation Class,

Imagine a man traveling in a strange land. He is tired and his feet become sore. He comes to a fork in the road. He pauses and thinks to himself: "Which way should I go, to the left or the right?" The road to the left seems to lead through a scenic view - perfectly shaded with just enough sun and green grass and lots of fruit trees and flowers and springs full of crystal, clear water. The man decides to take that road.

He walks for some time and everything seems to be just right. Everything is going according to plan and all is well. Up ahead he sees the end of the road. This is curious because he was fairly certain that the road would go on endlessly. He comes to the last step and sees before him a very deep and inescapable pit. One more step forward and it will be a long drop and a big splat. There is only one thing left to do. He goes back to the fork in the road.

Now he turns to the right. What a road! No shade and not a fruit tree or a blade of green grass in sight, no flowers, and no springs full of crystal, clear water to quench the thirst. There is nothing but burning sand. He grows terribly tired and weary. After walking many miles he sees a beautiful city in the distance. With a renewed determination he strains with all the strength he has left. At last, he is at the end of his journey. He has arrived at the greatest place that one can be - a place that he may call Home.

All of us are on a journey in a strange land. Here we have no lasting city. You have come to a fork in the road. Today you are to declare your choice. Will it be to the left or to the right? To your left there is a very wide path with many pleasures and treasures that will no doubt satisfy many of your earthly desires. But this path ends abruptly, and at the end of it there is the very deep and inescapable pit of destruction and eternal hell.

Or, will you seek the city that is to come? The road to the right is that of Christ and his truth. And it leads through the desert of tribulation and self-denial. It is no easy road. You will feel like giving up. It will take a tremendous amount of strength. But at the end of this road there is the beautiful city, a real home of love and bliss, a heavenly home where your Father in heaven waits for you and will give you the crown of eternal life with all that it implies!

The path to the left is the way of a life that is lived in sinfulness and sweet, little lies and false promises and a very deep pit. The path to the right is the way of forgiveness, solid, life-strengthening truth, and promises fulfilled - a home of love and every good thing. **Which Way Will You Go?** My dear children, choose the way of truth and walk in it. Nothing would be greater to the Lord God who made you than for you to be with him forever! And let me assure you that as one of your pastors, there is nothing that would please me more than for me to one day be able to echo the words of the apostle John, in 2 John 4, and say about you: "I rejoice greatly that I find my children walking in truth!"

And that brings us to our appointed gospel lesson for this Fourth Sunday of Easter. What we have here is a classic confirmation text - Jesus, the Good Shepherd. He says, "The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." When it comes to the way in which we might go, prayerfully we are like sheep who follow the lead of the Good Shepherd who makes us to lie down in green pastures and beside still waters and restores our soul. As it says in Psalm 23, he leads us "in paths of righteousness for his name's sake ... even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death." There is nothing then to fear when Jesus is in the lead and we are following him.

And what a comfort it is to know that our Lord Jesus goes on before us. That means that he has already traveled the road on the right. Granted, the road to the right was a rough road that brought him to a cross. But the end of that rough road was his resurrection from the dead and his entrance into glory. This is the road he traveled that we may follow him and reach the same destination of glory. His voice speaks the truth in opposition to the lie. That road that he traveled was the road that he traveled to save us.

Jesus became one of us knowing that without him there would be no other way for us other than death and hell because of our sins. He sets before us another way - the way of life. It was no easy road for Jesus. He came into this world to do what we have failed to do. He lived a perfect life for us that we might be counted as perfect. From the time of his conception to his horrific death on the cross and burial he took to himself all of our sorrows. He took them to the cross where he suffered our sufferings, died our deaths, and endured the hell of every human being so that forgiveness might be had by all. And whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Make no mistake about it, the forces of evil and this unbelieving world will do everything in its power to persuade you to abandon your faith in Jesus. They will work to take you away from the gospel and sacraments. Teachers and politicians and your friends will make you feel stupid and even persecute you with the hope that you will eventually rebel against your parents and pastors. They want you to join them in the way they have chosen, but will lead you to a very deep pit at the end of your journey. Jesus has in mind for you a true escape from this mess of a world and death and hell. He has in mind for you a new heaven and earth where the Lord is with us in all that is good. Do not let the devil and his followers deceive you and rob you of the truth you have today. As it says in Hebrews 10:23, "... hold fast the confession of [y]our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."

I realize that it is not an easy matter to walk in the way of truth and follow in the steps of Jesus. Nevertheless, the number one concern for all of us is that we maintain our faith. Many deceive themselves into thinking that they do not need faith. Many believe in themselves and live for themselves. They love themselves to satisfy their cravings while using people and even God for their own ends. May the rod and staff of our Savior be with us and comfort us. May his rod help to defend us. And may his staff deliver us from every danger. We are to embrace the Shepherd's care for us as love, just as we are to embrace those moments when the Good Shepherd allows us to go through hard moments in life. As it says in Proverbs 3:11-12, "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."

In order to keep us from failing and keep us headed toward the eternal, beautiful city where our Lord forever dwells, the Holy Spirit has given us the means of grace. Our first lesson for this morning gives us an understanding of how the ancient church survived. Like the people of the past, we are to gather with one another around the means of grace, for the means of grace is that place where we find Jesus who shepherds us. As our first lesson says: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” They continually pursued growth in the words of Scripture. They lived in baptism that gave them the name of the Saving God and made them family. And they received the love of Jesus in his very body and blood for the forgiveness of their sins. And they prayed for help, because they always needed it.

Do not set these things aside, for if you do, you can expect to drift away and lose the gifts that have been so graciously given to you at the cross and empty tomb. Hear the word and do not resist the love of God toward you. Receive it and the sacraments by faith so that you may abide in Jesus and he in you. Live your life as if today you will meet Jesus.

Therefore, do not think to yourselves that you have already finished the fight today. Rather, you have only begun to fight the good fight of faith. Your soul-saving faith has been kindled in your hearts like the flame on a candle. Keep this in mind: it only takes a bad wind to easily extinguish it. Great will be the blessings if you protect that flame and walk in truth. Jesus, your Shepherd - your Champion - your King is there to lead you to his victory and the beautiful city of heaven. Again the question is: **Which Way Will You Go?** My prayer is that you will go with Jesus!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott