

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, February 20, 2024
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“The Gutford Road”

READINGS: Psalm 5:4-8 – You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the Lord abhors. But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple. Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies – make straight your way before me.

Matthew 7:13-14 – “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

Last week I had the opportunity to drive Gutford Road in Clarksville. I had gone to visit Harold Klapel at P.A.M. and needed to travel over to Baptist Floyd. The quickest route was along Silver Creek on Gutford. What a piece of work that road is! There are curves everywhere along it, two of them 90 degree turns. There are hills, hidden driveways, and places where you cannot see cars coming toward you until you're right on top of them. It's a tricky road by day. It's downright scary at night.

I have often thought how very much like life itself Gutford Road is. What I mean is our lives also have ups and downs, sharp curves when things suddenly change directions, and unforeseen obstacles that hinder our way. Grievances and sorrows come at us out of nowhere. Disappointments slow our progress. Temptations lure us to take side paths and turn-outs that seem like scenic routes but turn out to be dead-ends and tourist traps. We seldom know what's around the next bend in the road. Sometimes we labor up a steep incline only to suddenly find ourselves going at breakneck speed down the opposite slope. Life's road can be just as trying and just as tricky as driving Gutford at 5:30 on a late December evening. What's a person to do?

Our texts for today come from different eras in the history of God's people, but both of them speak to the journeys we are on. While we cannot foresee and sometimes have little control over the path life brings us, we do have a roadmap that helps us to navigate that road with assurance and success. While our material life can be difficult and confusing, both David and Jesus direct us to a spiritual path that aids us and even protects us from the pitfalls and wrong turns of life.

It's often referred to as “the straight and narrow”. David asks God to guide him into a straight path that acknowledges and serves the true God with obedience and Godly ethics. He contrasts that kind of life with the actions of those who do not fear the Lord but seek only to serve themselves and their sinful ambitions. We see these things demonstrated all the time in the lives of those who live only for their own pleasure and comforts. Those are lives that do not travel a path that leads to God and eternal life. Rather those are lives that lead to destruction. The little kingdoms they carve out for themselves turn to dust when their last breath escapes them.

Jesus speaks of the narrow path. My brother-in-law Mike and my sister Sally recently visited us. He complained quite plaintively about how narrow the roads are in Floyd County. He is used to a square mile grid pattern in Michigan with the county roads laid out absolutely straight with generous roadsides that separate the roads from the ditches. He was a bit frightened by our roads that hardly ever run straight and true and which go from pavement to ditch in a matter of inches. Jesus' words can also frighten the sinner. The path that leads to eternal life is a narrow one and exclusive. Jesus is the only way there and is the only door through which we may enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

That's not what much of the world wants to say and believe. To many, which religion a person holds to is unimportant. "I'm spiritual but not religious," they claim. "All religions are basically the same. They all point us to the same end," they exclaim. "Christianity is chauvinistic and exclusionary. Who are you to judge other religions and cultures as deficient?" We don't. Jesus died for everyone in the world. We offer his grace to everyone. But he himself said, "No one comes to the Father except through me." That makes the path narrow but also the one that gives life.

When next you have need to travel on Gutford Road, be careful! It's narrow and not at all straight. Keep your eyes on the road and your mind on what you're doing. In the same way, commit your path unto the Lord, letting his Word and Holy Spirit guide you on your life's journey. Fix your eyes on Jesus while being watchful of the unrighteousness to which you can be drawn. This is the path that leads to eternal life. This is "The Way" – our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- 1) **LENTEN SERVICES** are being offered every Wednesday. Services start at 7:00 PM. Our overall theme is "The Forgiveness Challenge" and the pastors are interviewing various Biblical characters whose lives or stories teach us important truths about the forgiveness of God and the forgiveness we can give to one another. This week King Ahab visits with us.
- 2) The **SUGARBUSH MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL** takes place near Salem on Saturday and Sunday, February 24-25 and March 2-3. Grace will once again be serving breakfast and lunch both days and both weekends. We'll need LOTS of help, so if you are able, sign up soon.