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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 21, 2014
15th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Ephesians 2:19-21 Matthew 10:16-22

Hymns: 787; 447; 755; 54

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Proverbs 4:14-23

14 Do not enter the path of the wicked,

And do not walk in the way of evil.

15 Avoid it, do not travel on it; Turn away from it and pass on.

16 For they do not sleep unless they have done evil;

And their sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall.

17 For they eat the bread of wickedness,

And drink the wine of violence.

18 But the path of the just is like the shining sun,

That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.

19 The way of the wicked is like darkness;

They do not know what makes them stumble.

20 My son, give attention to my words;

Incline your ear to my sayings.

21 Do not let them depart from your eyes;

Keep them in the midst of your heart;

22 For they are life to those who find them,

And health to all their flesh.

23 Keep your heart with all diligence,

For out of it spring the issues of life.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Pilgrimage

The idea of this temporal life being a journey is one that dates back easily to Abraham. The patriarchs looked at life on earth as being only their transitory home. They were traveling to another home, a heavenly home. But the journey can be confusing, and challenging and even dangerous as we walk the path of this life. There are a number of different hazards along the way that may trip us up, but the greatest hazard of all is that we might stray onto the wrong path, and get ourselves turned around so that we are walking the path to destruction rather than the path that leads to life. The path that leads to death is an attractive road to follow. So it is that the Lord speaks to us time and again in the Scriptures about --

THEME: Staying on the Right Path in Life.

Already Solomon saw how important it was to be diligent about --

I. Avoiding the Path of Evil

Proverbs 4:14-17 Do not enter the path of the wicked, And do not walk in the way of evil. 15 Avoid it, do not travel on it; Turn away from it and pass on. 16 For they do not sleep unless they have done evil; And their sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall. 17 For they eat the bread of wickedness, And drink the wine of violence.

Our family used to go hiking and backpacking for our vacations. Some of the trails were easy. Some were far more challenging. If we were going to make it to the correct camp site we needed to stay on the right trail. To reach one of the rustic cabins we used on occasion the hike began on a wide and easy road used by the park rangers. After a half mile or so there was a narrow crooked trail that broke off to the left. At times this trail was hardly a trail at all, and was even slanted and there was a small stream where one had to walk across stones set in the stream to help get across. It was a tricky little path, uninviting, and actually on dark days one a person might walk by. However, as inviting as the wide road was, if we were to reach our destination we had to take that other path. By the way, I checked out that wide and easy road, it ended at a cliff with

a drop off of about sixty feet straight down to Lake Superior
Wandering down that road in the dark could easily end in disaster.

So it is with our walk in life. Often times we find ourselves walking alongside the people of this world, It is unavoidable, but our final destination is very different. We need to see where the right trail markers are, and turn away from the path the rest of the world is traveling on. It can be very enticing to see the numbers of people following the easy road, and see how easy life could be for us if we conformed to this world, but that road does not lead to where we want to be, that is with the Lord.

Our text tells us that the ways of the wicked are destructive and bent on getting ahead at all costs that is “all costs” to others. We may think that people are basically good, and Solomon is using too broad of a brush when painting this picture. While it is true that people are nice and good enough neighbors and we can work with them and do business with them and what we see on the news is the extreme that is why it is on the news that does not make Solomon wrong in his observation. How many unborn innocents have lost their life just in Minnesota just this year simply because these infants were inconvenient to someone? The number is in the thousands. People are happy to report that the number is down from previous years. That is but one example of how evil has permeated our society. The high percentage of children born out of wedlock offers evidence of the low regard society has for the Lord’s institution of marriage. There are other areas where the morality of the world is pushed upon those who would follow the right paths, and when we resist the response is startling and harsh. We dare not cave in to that pressure. We dare not close our eyes to the evil in this world, and the tragic end that will come to those who travel down that path. Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 7:13-14 “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

We have been shown the narrow and difficult path that leads to life. May we always be found --

II. Following the Path that leads to Perfect Light.

Proverbs 4:18-19 But the path of the just is like the shining sun, That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. 19 The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what makes them stumble.

I would like to refer back to my many backpacking trips once more. Often we would be hiking for a couple of miles or more in dense forest with a heavy canopy, when even in the middle of a bright and sunny day it remained quite dark in the woods. If it started to get a little late in the day before we reached our destination, which it did at times, it would begin to seem quite dark indeed. And then as we drew closer to our camp site, which was often at the mouth of a river or the shore of a lake there would be a break in the forest and looking down the trail one could see that light, yes the light that came down the trail towards us guiding leading us on encouraging us on our way. As one got closer the light grew brighter, until we exuberantly took those last few steps in the clearing where we would stay. We reached our goal, and got to see the glorious sunshine over Lake Superior.

So it is also with our spiritual walk. It is long, and seems to be a dark and dreary way before us as we walk on our way to heaven. Often the clouds overhead make it seem a dark path indeed that the Lord has sent down before we reach our heavenly goal, but if we look down that path we can see the light shining in the distance. Even from afar we can see that it is a bright light. As we grow closer the light is brighter and then the day will come for each us when we will stand in the glorious light of the Lord where we shall stay not only for a day or two, or even for a few years like our pilgrimage here on earth, but for all eternity.

2 Corinthians 4:6 It is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

God brought this light into our hearts by shining the gospel light upon us. He revealed His forgiving grace to us that we might know the reconciliation and peace which He brought into this world by

sending His Son to be that perfect and all satisfying sacrifice for our sins. Jesus abolished death by His resurrection that we might know the light of life, and have before us the light of eternal glory with the Lord.

Don't be misled by the philosophy of this world. You will only be cheated out of the splendor of the light that awaits us. The way of the world is darkness, and they don't even know what made them stumble. Again it is really different when you are far away from all artificial light. In the forest it can get really dark at night, and if you try to find your way even a short distance down the path in that darkness you will almost certainly trip over a root or rock or just a bump in the path or step right off the path and fall. It is really easy to fall flat on your face. I've done it, and my youngest daughter found it more than a little amusing. But it's not funny when people stumble and fall spiritually. It can mean death for one's soul. They don't even know what made them fall to their death.

That is the danger sin holds. To practice sin, that is to incorporate some sinful into one's life so that it becomes a part of one's lifestyle can be dangerous indeed. That is darkness. One becomes convinced that one's own sin is not damnable or spiritually dangerous. One becomes convinced that there is no harm in one's path. One might become convinced that since lightening didn't come down from heaven to strike me dad, so God must not be overly upset with what I'm doing.

Ignoring God's word is very hazardous. Let us proceed down the path of life --

III. Paying Attention to the Lord's Directions.

Proverbs 4:20-23 My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. 21 Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart; 22 For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh. 23 Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

When backpacking on trails that were unfamiliar I would pay close attention to the charts and maps I had picked up at the ranger station. Once one gets deep in the woods I find it is easy to get

turned around, and lose track of north and south. That canopy overhead is often thick enough that one can't see the sky. And the sunlight is so filtered that it is hard to tell exactly where the sun is. Oh yeah that thing about moss being on the north side of the tree, well that can really get you lost because I have found that moss can grow on any side of a tree. No, it is better for me to stay on marked trails, and pay attention the guide maps referencing them from time to time to make sure I haven't turned off on a game trail, or some other side trail made by hunters.

That's all Solomon is telling us. Use the guide book that charts our course to heavenly light. Read what it says. Stay familiar with the Word of God, knowing that it is the authoritative source to guide you through the dense forest of this life. The Lord will keep you on your trail. The Word of God is a great blessing for those who possess it and keep it in their hearts. "They are life to those who find them!" The Word of God brings life to our hearts, and so we need to keep it, that is follow the Lord's direction and guidance from His Word in all our ways and we will preserve our hearts from corruption, building up a treasure of god's grace within us. What does Jesus say?

Luke 6:45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil.

There is so much in the world that would pollute our hearts and corrupt our way of life, that we need to pay close attention to where we allow ourselves to walk as we make our way through this life on our pilgrimage to heaven. Thank the Lord that in His grace He led down that path "**That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.**"

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.