

"The Path of Life"

Psalm 16:11

25 April Anno Domini 2005

Funeral Sermon in Memory of Arlan Cook
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Dear family members of Arlan, friends, neighbors, congregational members, and especially you, Erna,

May God's grace, mercy and peace ever be yours in the Name of the LORD our God - in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dearly Beloved,

At such times as these, the hearts of God's people are filled with equal parts of grief and joy, of sadness and thanksgiving. The tears of sorrow are tempered with the tears of gladness, for Arlan has been called from this fallen world and has been called to the Paradise of the LORD God - from you, to Christ - from the valley of the shadow of death, to the heaven where there is only the eternal Light of Life. Arlan's journey from here to eternity's threshold was long and difficult; not only for him, but also for you; not only for you, but also and especially for Jesus.

During this day that falls between the Easter Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Ascension, let us ponder three paths: the Path of Christ, the Path that Arlan was called to travel, and the path ahead of you. Please listen to Psalm 16:11 and hear about "The Path of Life."

"Thou dost show me the Path of Life; in Thy Presence there is fullness of joy, in Thy right hand are pleasures forevermore."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Here is an ancient Greek riddle, thousands of years old. Can you solve it? "What has one voice, but goes on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and on three legs in the evening?" Answer: Man. In the morning of life, man is a baby crawling on all fours. In the midday of life man walks erect on two legs. In the evening of life a hunched-over man uses a cane, a walking-stick, or in the case of a certain man in a nursing home, a walker in order to get around - three legs. Then, sooner or later, a day comes when one is no longer able to walk and the time to end the journey in this world draws near.

Therefore, first of all, consider the Path of Jesus. Because of rebellion against God and the sin of man, eternal death and everlasting destruction and burning isolation from God awaited everyone of us - from the infant to the oldest. Hell is what each deserved and Hades is where each one was headed. However, the LORD God would not have it be that way and He sought to provide a way for each human being to be saved. This way would be the Path of Life and Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whosoever

believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal Life" (John 3:16).

The Son of God came into this world just as we are, though without sin. He was a true human being. As such, Jesus is also the answer to the riddle: "What has one voice, but goes on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and on three legs in the evening?" Jesus was born of Mary in the little town of Bethlehem and, in the morning of His Life, that is, as a baby, God began by crawling on all fours on His way to the place where He would be crucified for the sins of all babies and for the sins of the world, yours and mine included. In order for all people - both babies and grown-ups - to be shown and to have the Path of Life, Jesus would die our deserved death. Thus, all could join with the psalmist and say . . .

"Thou dost show me the Path of Life; in Thy Presence there is fullness of joy, in Thy right hand are pleasures forevermore."

As a grown man in the noon-day of His time here on this earth, Jesus walked about on His two feet. Ever on His way to the Good Friday crucifixion, the Son of God and the Son of Man gave His Word and blessed the use of water in Holy Baptism. On His way to Calvary's holy mountain, Jesus defeated the Devil, forgave sins, healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, proclaimed liberty to those imprisoned in sin, raised the dead, opened the ears of the deaf to hear this Good News, and gave His Body and His Blood in the Holy Supper. Jesus did this in order that all could join with the psalmist and say . . .

"Thou dost show me the Path of Life; in Thy Presence there is fullness of joy, in Thy right hand are pleasures forevermore."

And of the three legs in the evening of His Life? Jesus did indeed have a walking-stick. It was the cross that He staggered under on His way through the streets of Jerusalem as He journeyed to the Place of the Skull. There on Golgotha, Jesus was nailed to that walking-stick and behold, that doleful Day came when He was no longer able to walk and the time to end the journey in this world had drawn near. It was the three-hour evening that began at noon as darkness covered the entire land and Christ Jesus was forsaken by His Father as His Son experienced hell . . . all in order that you might never be forsaken by God . . . all in order that you might not spend one second in hell . . . all in order that you might behold the Path of Life and join with the psalmist and say . . .

"Thou dost show me the Path of Life; in Thy Presence there is fullness of joy, in Thy right hand are pleasures forevermore."

On the third day Christ Jesus rose again from the dead and stood on both of His nail-pierced feet. The Easter angel said, "Fear not, for I know that you seek Jesus Who was crucified, He is not here; for He is Risen, as He said" (Matthew 28:6). Thus is fulfilled Job's confession of faith: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job 19:25-27). But not only is Christ risen, He is also ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. And because Christ lives, also will those who believe and trust in Him, live forever.

Truly such ones may declare: "Thou dost show me the Path of Life; in Thy Presence there is fullness of joy, in Thy right hand are pleasures forevermore."

Now ponder the Path of Life that Arlan was called to travel. According to the gracious invitation extended to all nations, peoples and ages, he received the Holy Spirit-given gift of faith on November 4, 1923, and with it eternal life, forgiveness and salvation, when as a baby, before he was even able to crawl on all fours, he was baptized in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Then Arlan arose to stand on his own two feet and, during that time, he confirmed the Christian faith promising to endure all things, even death, rather than falling away from, or wandering off of, the Path of Life. His two feet, strengthened by God, carried Arlan into Church on Sundays in order to be in the Presence of the LORD God Almighty. Arlan sang his joyful "amen" to the announcement of the forgiveness of sins and entered into the Presence of God. Arlan and Erna walked together to the communion rail and knelt down in the Presence of the Lord to receive the very Body and the true Blood of their Savior, Jesus the Christ.

And then came that third leg in the evening of Arlan's life . . . the walker that became necessary because of heart problems and strokes. He welcomed pastoral visits wherein he heard the Word of Law and Gospel, followed the liturgy of the Church and received the Lord's Supper, all of which refreshed him on the Path of Life. Then came the more recent day when the walker had to be abandoned. Still Arlan knew that, though he walked through the valley of the shadow of death, the Lord was with him; that Jesus, with rod and staff, comforted Arlan, leading him in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake, which is the Path of Life. Last Wednesday, Arlan was called home to be with the Lord and now Arlan understands and experiences fully what the psalmist declared:

"Thou dost show me the Path of Life; in Thy Presence there is fullness of joy, in Thy right hand are pleasures forevermore."

And that brings us to you . . . whether, on this day, you walk on all fours, on two legs, or on three. Morning has come. Mid-day is here. When will your evening arrive? I do not know and neither do you. Behold the Path of Life and the path of death are before you this day.

The Path of Life is the way whereon one is convinced that salvation is by the grace of God through faith in Christ's righteousness given to us, His forgiveness earned for us. In the Path of Life all sins are gone from the person because of Jesus' death on the cross and His Resurrection and Ascension. Such Christians live in their Baptism, long to hear that they are forgiven of all their sins in the Name of the Father and of the . . . Son and of the Holy Spirit. The faithful on the Path of Life hunger and thirst for the Lord's Supper and are satisfied in the Holy Communion.

The path of death is the way whereon one is convinced that heaven is earned by being good enough, or by trying hard to be a good person, or by ignoring God and His promises. These are lies that end in death. Those on the path of death neglect the baptism of babies, reject hearing the Word of forgiveness announced in Church, and have no desire to receive the Lord's Supper for the remission of all sins. In doing so, they snub Jesus and declare that Jesus' awful suffering and death are of no worth or benefit.

Many of you here today, like you in particular, Erna, rejoice as you continue on the Path of Life . . . and you, Erna, so much so that you have even told me what you want the text to be for your funeral

sermon . . . John 14:2-6 where the following is recorded when Jesus spoke to His disciples, "In My Father's House are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.' Thomas saith unto him, 'Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?' Jesus saith unto him, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.'"

Others of you are not on the Path of Life, and if this is you, please know and please take to heart what Jesus the Christ has done for you, because today you have heard enough to be on the Path of Life . . . that is, to despair of your own efforts to save and justify yourself and to be good enough to earn heaven. You have heard enough to know the answers to these questions, "Has Christ Jesus died for all your sins?" "Does He want you and your children to be baptized and to continue to be in His Presence and hear His Word?"

Just as the Prophet Jeremiah was commanded on one occasion to say to the people, "Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I set before you the Way of Life and the Way of Death'" (Jeremiah 21:8), so is proclaimed to you this day, "Behold, I set before you the Path of Life and the path of death." "In the Path of righteousness is Life, but the way of error leads to death" (Proverbs 12:8).

May God grant that you be able to say to him before the evening arrives, "Thou dost show me the Path of Life; in Thy Presence there is fullness of joy, in Thy right hand are pleasures forevermore." Amen.