

Order of Worship for 10/21/12, title, “Taking the Path to Glory”, text, John 13:34-14:1-11

Opening Song
Invocation: Isaiah 43:1-7 and Prayer

Welcome and Announcements
Ministry Moment

Sunday Evening in the Word
Sermon on the Mount: “The Sanctity of Marriage”, Matthew 5:31-32
5:30 to 7:00 pm, in the Library

“The Prayer Closet”

October 21, 2012

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

1. **Sheryl Jackson and Lynn Silvernale:** the Lord will supply all their needs as they settle in Oroville; they will have clarity regarding the Lord’s will and calling for them in their new situation; the Spirit will open their hearts and the hearts of many to them in sustaining Christian fellowship
2. **President Obama:** the Lord superintends his thoughts and actions for the good of the nation; the Spirit convicts him of the truth; the Lord protects him and his family from all evil
3. **The Congregation:** that the Spirit moves in our midst for a spiritual awakening in seeking the Lord’s face to know his will for us as we seek to serve our neighbors and community with the grace and truth of God
4. **Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week:**
5. **Young Adult of the Week:**

We continue today with our study of the Word of God. The title for the study today in John’s Gospel is “The Path to Follow”. I mentioned this already in preparing us to hear God’s Word in the Invocation (Isaiah 43:1-7). We are called to follow Jesus.

We know this, but we don’t always focus on it. So dominant in our culture is the focus on “I’m saved!” that we don’t always soberly consider, “Saved for what?” It is the “for what” that needs to occupy us. In examining the New Testament, and here where we are looking at Jesus’ conversation with His men on the night of His betrayal – these chapters in John’s Gospel, 13-17, are called the Upper Room discourse and this is where Jesus was when He had the Last Super, He sent Judas out into the night and then Judas will later on lead the Temple and Roman guards into the Garden of Gethsemane where they will then haul Jesus off and He will be crucified at the end of an agonizing period of time. So Jesus is talking with His men and He is wanting to prepare them for what they are about to experience.

It is interesting if you compare the Gospel of John with the other [three gospels], they are not always organized in the same way. One of the ways in which there is a significant and interesting difference is right here. All four of the Gospels recount Jesus’ words to Peter, and those words were that Peter is going to deny Him three times. If you are familiar with the gospel story and especially this portion of it, you know that this features very prominently in all of the end accounts. But they don’t all put the words of Jesus in the same place. Ancient historians did not have the same sense about the necessity for chronological sequence that we do. We think that if you rearrange the parts and pieces [of an event] that somehow you are cheating. That was not their perspective at all. When they wrote the gospels in particular, and with all historians at that time, they would take parts and pieces and they would arrange them in order to emphasize certain parts of the truth that they felt you needed to hear. That is what John does.

Go with me to John 13 and read with me verses 36-38. This is the way John recounts what Jesus said to Peter when Peter asks the question, *“Simon Peter said to [Jesus], ‘Lord, where are you going?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.’ Peter said to him, ‘Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.’ Jesus answered, ‘Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.’”*

These words of Jesus and Peter obviously are significant all by themselves. But whereas Matthew, Mark and Luke place that little dialogue between Jesus and Peter right before they leave the Upper Room and go to the Garden of Gethsemane: that is where they place it. But John doesn’t. John puts [the dialogue] at the very beginning of all of the Upper Room Discourses, all that teaching that Jesus is now going to give to His men. But more significantly, [if we go back to verse 31 of chapter 13:] notice that when Judas had gone out Jesus said,

“Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another;

We need to appreciate what John has just done. John has just recorded the new commandment from Jesus – “Love one another” – and immediately after he has this dialogue between Jesus and Peter in which Jesus says to Peter, “You’re not going to love Me, you are going to deny me.” The context is actually somewhat deeper than that. Because as those words that we just read together indicate, Jesus not only says of Peter, who is one of the closest of the disciples to Jesus, that he is going to deny Him, but Jesus has also just gotten through saying, “By the way, I am out of here, I am not going to stay.” Put yourself in the position not of Peter and Jesus at this point, but of the other disciples. They hear Jesus say, “Love one another,” they hear Jesus say, “. . .but by the way I am going away and won’t be around,” and they hear Jesus say, “. . .by the way, one of your leaders is going to absolutely deny me three times.” The question arises, what happens to love?

Don't you wonder if any of those men during the unfolding hours of that night began to entertain second thoughts, began to doubt. “Is Jesus' expectation of us even remotely close to real?” And what about us [gathered here today]? We hear the gospel, we hear that God loves us, and then life goes wrong. You wonder, “Am I going to hang on? Can I do this?”

Back up for a moment and put yourself again into the mental framework of the disciples. What do you think it was like to actually have been with Jesus day in and day out for three years, approximately? They were with Jesus when Jesus walked up to a leper and laid His hands on him, which you just did not do with a leper, and healed him. They experienced that. They were with Jesus when He cast a demon out of the son of a man and the man had to say, “[I believe,] help my unbelief!” They were with Jesus when He spoke God's word to the great crowd and then He fed them. He fed in excess of seven thousand people with seven loaves and two fish.

But think as well of the sheer labor of feeding that many people. Think what it meant for those disciples to keep coming back again and again, and then hauling food out to thousands of people! Jesus modeled something to those men. It wasn't just that He gave to them; He modeled in front of them. What they experienced was a lesson in how to serve. That is a lesson that we obviously want to learn, we need to know. This, indeed, is why we are saved. Why are we saved? We are saved to be like Jesus. What does it mean to be like Jesus? It is to serve. So we can reflect about what it meant to serve with Jesus. One of the realities was that as time goes on, and as the reputation of Jesus as a healer and a provider grows, more and more people come, pressing in on Him and they are wanting, they are demanding. So the men learn what it means to serve others under the weight of a continually increasing demand from those whom you serve.

Of course it is not just an increasing demand, bringing them to the place of exhaustion as they try and meet the need; but when you read the gospels you realize that in spite of all the good that Jesus does there is an increasing depth of incomprehension and resistance; just the opposite of what we would expect. Beyond that, in the background, there is the murderous hostility of the religious authorities in Israel. That is the context in which this model of serving is given.

(All that I am doing is trying to draw you into the emotional drama of the narrative that John writes) [Jesus and the disciples] have gathered together in a safe place (the Upper Room), they are going to celebrate the great festival of God's grace in saving Israel out of Egypt, and here in this privileged place amongst the select group, they learn these three terrible things: already we have looked at the statement, Judas will betray Me; Peter will deny Me; and I, Jesus says, am going away. Don't you think that underneath, those men were beginning to say, “What?” By the time they get to the Garden of Gethsemane and the temple and the Roman guards come, what do the disciples do? They cut and run. When I read that I feel like, “What a bunch of wimps!” But understand the degree to which their confidence has already been undermined by a whole series of events stretching back deep into the weeks before.

As I have said before, Jesus in the Upper Room Discourse wants to prepare His men so they are ready. I hope that my comments have done enough to bring up something of the emotional tension that they might have been feeling so that now when we read the words in John 14:1-11, they will perhaps make more sense to us. Jesus says,

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.” Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’ Philip said to him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me

has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.” [5b]

In some ways this is a strange conversation. The emotional distance, what you might call the existential perspective, Jesus on one side is sitting in one place and all the disciples are sitting in another place. Why is that so? Because the disciples don’t know what’s coming, but Jesus does. John concentrates attention on Peter, but all the other gospels tell us all the disciples make the same protestations of loyalty to Jesus: “No matter what is going to happen, Jesus, we are with you.” These men loved Him – would we have? I suspect that Jesus’ words cut them deeply: “I am leaving. I am not going to be here.” Our hearts are complex. We hold contradictory convictions and emotions within us. Who of us has not been angry at God? Who of us has not felt as if he was abandoned? Who of us walking into some situation has not felt as if you were an orphan, that there was no protector, no provider? Suddenly the light of truth has gotten dim; the world is all of shadows and uncertainty: of course! I suspect that these disciples, already having heard Jesus three times predicting that He was going to die, already within themselves they have these uncertainties even as they profess their loyalty.

There is irony in Jesus’ words in John 14:1. If the men are troubled, surely it is because of what [He] has just said to [them]. He has just said to them, “I am leaving and you’re going to deny Me.” There is something for us to understand. Jesus was not a cheerleader. Jesus in preparing His men, is not simply trying to pump them up and make them feel good. On the contrary, Jesus is like a coach: He wants to handle His men so they are able to meet the challenge that is coming at them. That requires that they know the truth about Him and themselves. Jesus’ purpose is to prepare His men to endure and then to recover from the impending events. Jesus knows how horrible the next 24-36 hours is going to be, so He wants to prepare these men to take up the glorious burden of the gospel of salvation which His death and resurrection will secure. But He knows He is going to have to drag them all the way through the horrible events that are just about to occur, and He wants them to be able to stand. Despite contrary experiences they know what they believe, they know where they are standing and they will not bend or give up or run away even though they all run away that night.

Jesus is trying to get them grounded in certain things that they know. There is a fundamental truth here: you cannot love what you do not know. So He wants to open their minds. The comfort which Jesus offers is at once thrilling and puzzling. What comfort does He offer to them? What can be more glorious than the prospect which Jesus opens before them that we find in these verses? He is going to go to His Father in heaven and His Father in heaven has a palace, and in this palace there are rooms, and o my, that is going to be for them! But not only that: He says, “I am going to be there as well, and I want you to be with me.” That is just fantastic! These words are given to comfort and sustain us through whatever trouble and sacrifice we may be called upon to make for the kingdom and the king. Paul the Apostle says something very similar that relates to all of us. How many of us are familiar with Romans 8:18? *“I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”* Hallelujah! Jesus in the words that He speaks here in John 14:1-3 gave His men a glimpse of future glory.

But the words are not without difficulty. That difficulty comes quickly to light in the conversation that follows. What does Jesus mean by saying that He will go and then that He will come [back] again? You and I know exactly what He means. But if you were a disciple in that room that night you did not know what He meant. Jesus adds to their unease by saying that they know where He is going, they know the way to where He is going. How do they respond? “No we don’t. We don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way.” That is Thomas’ response. The Father’s house was in heaven. What do they know about heaven? You cannot love or draw comfort or strength from what you don’t know, and they don’t know anything about heaven. Now how many times have you been in this place? “Hang in there, don’t give up!” “Why?” “Because in the end you are going to go to heaven!”

“Cool!” Is heaven really more satisfying than any pleasure that I can find here and now? How do you know? On faith? Well, I don’t know about you but the abstract possibility of being in a glorious place I have never seen sometimes gives scant strength for resisting present temptations. I believe that is what these men experienced. What do they know? What do they love? Jesus.

Notice the response: Thomas says to Him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going; how can we know the way?” Jesus answers, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” As evangelical Christians grounded in the Word of God we likely know these words well, and we know what they mean; the disciples did not. Jesus will need to turn their thoughts from the spatial and earth-bound to the spiritual and heaven bound. When they first heard Jesus’ words, “No one comes to the Father but through me,” they could not possibly have understood what He meant. The implications would be staggering, especially for those who all their lives and all the lives of their families and the whole existence of their people have believed that they were the chosen ones of God. This was the purpose and meaning of the covenant. This is the meaning of the story of Abraham who was the friend of God. What did it mean to be a Jew if it didn’t mean you already had access to the Father? Jesus says no one comes to the Father except through Me. “You mean David didn’t go to the Father? You mean Abraham didn’t go to the Father? You mean Moses didn’t go to the Father? What are you saying to us?” Well, nobody in this room is bothered by anything I just had to say, but notice that there is a parallel, isn’t there? “I was born in the church; I was raised in the church; I have always gone to church; my family has always gone to church. We’ve got church people for a thousand generations behind me. Are you telling me I don’t have access to the Father? Of course I have access to the Father: I am a Christian because I go to church!” What did Jesus say? “Oh, no; the only way you go to the Father is through Me. Don’t tell me about your church, don’t tell me about your family, don’t tell me about the long history, don’t tell me about the heritage. Don’t tell me about your habits. What is your relationship with me, because no one goes to the Father except through Me!”

Hopefully by drawing that analogy, that parallel between being a Jew in the Old Covenant and being Christian today we begin to sense some of the startling quality of Jesus’ words to His own disciples. They were good Jews. But that was not the way to the Father. So we catch this parallel between the two covenants and those who think they are but are not. “Surely we have access because we are part of the covenant people.”

In I Corinthians 15:1-2 Paul writes to the Corinthians, *“I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”* As eternal security Christians we all ignore that verse. We know that it only applies to the Nazarenes. That is because Nazarene doctrine says you can lose your salvation. So we know it is too bad for them and it is good for us because we don’t have to pay attention to that verse! But that is a foolish approach to the Bible: you can’t do that. You have to come to some understanding of what it is Paul is saying. Notice there that Paul says they are being saved. Do you notice that? [He does not say] that they are saved. We at this point in the history of Christianity face some difficulties because of the history that is behind us. The difficulty we face is what is called “decision centered Christianity.” I am going to do a cartoon of an heretical understanding of the nature of salvation. I am Joe sinner cruising along and suddenly God says, “Joe! I want your attention. I want you to believe in me.” Well, it doesn’t work. So God breaks Joe’s legs. Joe goes along and finally Joe is at this place where he is just miserable and along comes evangelist and evangelist says, “Joe, did you ever think about God and Jesus and being saved?” Joe responds: “O, man, that may be: I believe!” Whereupon the angels sing and all is well. In that little cartoon, when was Joe saved? You and I don’t have the vaguest idea. There are stages. I can give you the doctrinal answer: Joe was saved when he closes in personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as empowered by the Holy Spirit with unshakeable conviction that flows from the throne of God. That is when he was saved. Unless, of course, it was when he was chosen before the foundations of the world and his name was written down in the Lamb’s book of life. But in any case, in Joe’s experience as he is walking along, there are stages. Joe was a dufuss like many I know. He wasn’t thinking about God at all and then God said, “Think about me,” and

Joe said, “I think I will think about God.” That is a stage. Then Joe began to encounter difficulties and troubles in his life and somebody said, “Did you ever think you have difficulties and troubles in your life because you haven’t got a proper relationship with God?” Joe says, “Maybe I ought to think about my relationship with God. Maybe there is a God and maybe you can have a relationship with God.” That is a stage. So gradually, according to what Jesus says in John’s Gospel, 6:42 (sic.), the Father draws us to Jesus. Did you ever ask the question, what is that drawing process? Gradually God forces the heart to open and the mind to receive the truth of God and at some point Joe finally gets the light and he says, “Got it!” [That is for] today. But tomorrow he may forget. He may fall back a stage or two. Do any of you know Joe? Are any of you Joe? Ah!

At some point a person not only has to believe in God but also has to believe that God cares about sin. How many people do you know that think they are saved no matter what rotten things they do? This is pervasive! They do not understand that God loves holiness. There is a second passage that is worth looking at. 2 Corinthians 13:5. This is another one of those “Nazarene” type verses: This is what Paul says, *“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.”* “Can you recite the creed?” That is not what he is asking them to do. What he is asking them to do is to see whether or not they can see the imprint of God on their lives, whether or not they recognize they have been called away from sin and to holiness. That is what he is asking them to do. So he says, *“Do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail to meet the test.”*

Jesus asks His disciples to reflect on their personal experience with Him (we are back now to John 14). This is what He says: listen to these words in light of what Paul says to the Corinthians. Jesus says to His men, *“If you had known me, you would have known my Father also.”* When we started the message today I [asked] “What was it like to be with Jesus for three years?” What did Judas miss? He missed the Father; he never, somehow, got it. Jesus says to Philip, “Haven’t you been close enough to Me to sense the presence of the Father?”

If you have read through the Gospels, especially John’s Gospel, you know that what Jesus has just asked His disciples, He has asked the Pharisees over and over again. “Don’t you know My words are the Father’s words? Don’t you know My actions are the Father’s actions? Don’t you see that all that I am doing is exactly what the Father wants me to do?” He has asked the rotten Pharisees this questions and all His [disciples] are standing there saying to themselves, “Those Pharisees don’t know! They don’t get the picture.” Then Jesus turns around and says, “Don’t you see the Father in me?” And they all say, “Uh oh!” I think that this is a very specific and critical kind of reality that most of us experience in our personal growth in faith. We are cruising along, we assume we have a close personal working relationship with Jesus, but we don’t. Then Jesus comes in the Spirit and He says, “You, are you with me, or not?” Then there is a way you can find out as to whether you are with Him or not. What Paul says is we are to examine our lives.

When you look more carefully you begin to understand some of the difficulty of these disciples. Jesus responds and He says, *“From now on you do know him and have seen the Father.”* But Philip’s response is, *“Show us the Father and it is enough.”* And Jesus says, “Three years we have been together night and day, you have watched me do this, you have watched me do that, you have heard me say this, you’ve heard me say that; I have dealt with this kind of person and this kind of person: I have done all of these things, and you don’t see the Father, Philip? What am I supposed to do in order to get you to see that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” That is the dynamic of the exchange that goes on here.

No one knew Jesus better than these men. No one had a clearer or closer acquaintance with His words and His works. So I think that it is safe to say regarding the disciples that they simply did not believe what they knew. What do they know about Him? They know His miraculous powers. They know of the Spirit of God speaking through Jesus. They know that God has specifically chosen Jesus and sent Jesus. They even know that He is the Messiah for whom they have waited and prayed. They know it all, and they run away. Can you identify? To believe

something is to act in accordance with the truth that it is. So for these men, if they had believed what they knew, they would not have run away. They know it but they don't believe it.

They are waiting for something. If you follow the gospels you know that they are waiting for something. How would you know what they are waiting for? They are waiting for the special sign. That is what they are waiting for. What are they waiting for? They are waiting for the last confirmation that is finally going to bring it all home. They are waiting for Jesus to appear as the king! It is as if we are going to wait here praying until Jesus walks through the back door with a big crown on His head...at that moment we will believe what we know, that is, we will act consistently in accord with the truth we know. We will be compassionate, kind, gentle, truthful, trusting, consistent, generous: at that moment when Jesus walks through the back door with a crown on His head and we know He is the king. At that moment...

In Acts 1:6, after all the horrible events and after the glorious events, after the resurrection of Jesus, after Jesus has met with them for forty days and given them full explanation of how He is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies, what do the disciples ask Jesus right before He ascends and goes to heaven? “The kingdom? Is it now?” How powerfully our presuppositions and prejudices control the thoughts of our minds and the desires of our hearts. Let me ask the question which I think begs to be answered. The kingdom of God had become an idol in the hearts and the minds of the Jews. They worshiped in anticipation the establishment of the kingdom; they put their faith in the coming of the kingdom, rather than in the Living God. It is exceedingly difficult for us to surrender our dreams and our wants. We need to put them to death so that we die to ourselves and can live to God. So the question that any one of us needs to wrestle with is, “What is it that I insist God will do before I will believe what I know?” In other words, what keeps me from obedience? What keeps me from trust? What keeps me running down this path and that path, but not down the path with Jesus? What am I waiting for Him to do before I'm willing to give up and trust Him altogether?

Jesus's answer at this point – we will look at this next week – is “I am the way and the truth and the life.” For you and myself I just ask that during this week we come consistently before God and ask Him to reveal to you what it is we are hanging on to and insisting that God must first take care of and then we will believe?

Please pray with me: our Heavenly Father, You have made glorious promises to us, and Jesus has lived out a remarkable life and the record has been made. In a congregation like this, Father, we know a great deal, but I think I am on safe ground Father to say that we believe much less than we know. We don't want that to continue to be the case. We ask that in Your graciousness You would bring clarity of thought, help us to examine our lives and to see where it is we are stubbornly resisting believing in the truths You have made known to us. We ask this, our Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. Have you had times when you doubted your ability to persevere in the life of faith?
2. Does the example of Jesus and the record of ministry in the New Testament encourage or discourage you in striving for faithfulness?
3. Do you ever struggle with conflicting feelings about God, the gospel or the call to faithful living, witness and service?
4. Do you tend to think of or feel about Jesus as if He is your friend? Is the idea of living with Him one that strengthens you to pay whatever the cost may be?
5. Are you aware of stages of faith on the way to full faith in Christ? If so, at what stage are you?
6. Is it possible to “not believe what [you] know? How would that look in practice?
7. Have there been dreams/desires or prejudices or fears which you have had to put to death in order to faithfully follow Jesus – or that you need to?
8. How well do you know Jesus as the way?
9. Would you say you prize the Bible as God’s Word for your life?
10. Have you experienced the life of God in you?