

Sermon 2009 Epiphany 5
Text: Isaiah 40:21-31
Theme: "Settle in for a Long, Hard Ride"

Remember car trips with the family when the youngest inevitably asked the question, "Are we there yet?" Usually you were about 20 blocks from home right? We are not very patient people and we have a very skewed view of how life should be.

In general, human beings believe that life should be a pleasant walk through the park if one has lived a good, moral life. Now, if you add acts of worship and philanthropy to the mix, it should be even better, right? We understand that because we live in a broken world, that there will be the occasional bump in the road, but OVERALL, life should be good. That is why pietism so appeals to us. Pietists believe that their good choices and right living earns them something. Likewise, a pietist thinks that others should be punished for their wrong choices and if your life is in the toilet, they will immediately begin identifying all of the bad choices you made to deserve this punishment.

Pietism is a human system and therefore fraught with disaster. I avoid human systems as much as possible. I'm not a pietist, so I won't tell you that you should avoid human systems

as well. I believe that God created you as a free being who is able to pursue anything and everything. That's why St. Paul tells us that everything is permissible. Of course it is impossible for EVERYTHING to be beneficial and that is our challenge. God walks with us as we navigate a path that is not an easy walk through the park, where the choices are not easy as pie, and our hearts may say one thing while our heads say another. What is beneficial and what is not?

From God's perspective, we are climbing a dangerous, craggy mountain. There is danger on every side, terrifying beasts that seek to devour us, poison and thorns and biting and stinging. This is no park. It's more like a jungle. And God is not apologetic about that. Like Israelites chose to worship Canaanite gods so too do we chose to do things our way instead of God's. God tells us to give faithfully and we put in "what we think can afford," because what does God really understand about finances? God tells us to place him first in our lives and we place him first...right after a bunch of other stuff we want to do. God tells us to love one another and we love everyone who we deem

worthy of our love and whoever loves us back. Think of how often you have been critical of someone else. Were you loving them? And remember...it still counts even if the person was not present to hear you because God was. And it still counts if you only thought it, because God can hear that too and nothing upsets God more than when we speak or think badly about his kids.

We always do it our way. ALL OF US DO. That's why we end up stumbling up the craggy mountain because we have always done it our way. We have always rebelled against God's way and it's never going to change. So, buckle up and settle in for a long, hard ride. You cannot avoid it and standing around and pointing out everyone else's sins isn't going to make your walk any easier. But I will tell you what will.

God has not left us without the tools we need to make this climb. It is a difficult climb no doubt but with the right tools and the right company, we can make it just fine. See, God is no less with us when we fall into the thicket or step off the path into the darkness. He is still right there with us offering us what we need

to get back on the path. He offers us strength and wisdom and power in His Word. He gave us the pure unbridled power of the Holy Spirit in Baptism. He strengthens us for the climb with his own body and blood. And eventually, when the climb is through, we top the hill and walk into the paradise that he has prepared for us.

Now that paradise is not our reward for a good climb. It is simply what awaits us on the other side of the mountain regardless of how many times we veer off the path. That paradise is Christ's reward that he earned for living a perfect life and dying for our sins. Then he chose to give his reward to us. So the other side of the mountain is a gift to us too – just like Baptism and the Word and Holy Communion.

God's delight is not when you have everything well ordered and controlled on your march up the mountain, because you don't. You might fool some people with a well ordered facade but not God. He sees right through that front. God's delight is when we fully and completely lean on him. It is when we give up trying to pretend that we can make this climb on our own and throw our

hands up and let God drive. That is when we are lifted up like wings on eagles. That is when we are renewed and restored. That is when we begin to worry less about what is permissible and begin to rejoice in all that is beneficial. AMEN