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Sermon for Sunday, December 4, 2011

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 40: 1-11

Psalm 85: 8-13

Mark 1: 1-8

II Peter 3: 8-14

Sermon Title: "Road Construction, Christian Style"

Sermon Topic: Strengthening and Improving our Connection with God

Sermon Purpose: To teach that we need to improve, strengthen and widen our existing spiritual connection with God.

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Sermon Prayer: God of all creation: Guide our hearts and minds as we ponder your words to us, and allow your purpose and your Spirit to rule in our lives. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

"I can see a swath of sinners sittin' yonder,

And they're actin' like a pack of fools.

Starin' into space they let their minds all wonder,

Instead of studyin' the good Lord's rules.

Better pay attention,

Build your comprehension.

There's gonna be a quiz at your ascension.

Not to mention any threat of hell.

You know you've gotta learn your lessons well."

Every last description of the Promised Land tell you

You can get there if you keep alert.

Learning every line of every last commandment

may not help you, but it couldn't hurt.

First you gotta read 'em,

Then, you gotta heed 'em.

You never know when you're gonna need 'em.

Just as old Elijah said to Jezebel,

'You know you've got to learn you're lessons well."¹

John the Baptist came to announce Jesus' coming, he used the words from Isaiah: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."² John didn't address the heavenly host, but the people.

That's also what happens today. God's giving **us** a responsibility, today. When we first made a commitment to follow the way of Christ, in effect we built a highway of sorts to God, although God came out and met us along the way. That old road still leads to God, but like our physical highways and byways, that pathway often wanders around and travels some pretty bumpy and twisty terrain. In

¹ "Learn Your Lessons Well," from "Godspell," a musical based on the Gospel of Matthew.

² Mark 1: 3



continuing our Christian life, we need to make some improvements to our spiritual road – straightening windy stretches, leveling the rough places, widening narrow spots, or repaving areas made treacherous by potholes. God made the first connection, but he leaves the road **improvements** to us. For example, we may be following the way of Christ, but **still** harboring grudges or prejudice in our hearts.

We may be **following** the way of Christ, but still be tight-fisted with our resources, reluctant to financially support charitable missions and outreach ministries.

We may **be** following the way of Christ, but still be clinging to some behavior that we know doesn't measure up to the standards set by the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount.

We **may** be following the way of Christ, but still be treating people in our family with a disrespect we wouldn't dare show to strangers.

We may be following the way of **Christ**, but still refusing to use our talents with the church in a position where we know we can do some good.

We may be following the **way** of Christ, but still be dodging a specific call from God to commit ourselves to something he has lain upon our minds and our hearts.

We may be following the way of Christ, but still be inconsiderate of the genuine needs of some less fortunate people.

You can fill in more of these from your own life, but you get the idea.

Note that in each case I said we are following the way of Christ. It's not that these hindering factors take us **off** the Christian path; they just slow us **down** in our connection with God. (It's like comparing "dial-up" with "DSL" or using the local lanes instead of the express.)

The highway image is a useful one for us because it reminds us that there comes a time when we need to strengthen and improve our connection with God. For many of us, that connection already exists, but it's like a winding old highway that goes through every town along the way, hitting every traffic light and stop sign, and we poke along behind a lot of lumbering tractor trailers, farm machinery, and "Sunday drivers" while being stuck in no passing zones. We eventually come to see that just as the task of the highway people today is to improve, straighten, and widen existing roads, our task is to do the same thing with our **spiritual** road.

That **may** mean taking a close look to determine the bottlenecks, the grid locked sections, the potholed places and the no passing zones that slow our connection with God, and then offering them to him with a prayer such as, "Lord, I'm trying to follow you, but my (you can fill in the blank with whatever it is) creates a narrow place on my journey to you. Help me to surrender this hindrance and open a wider thoroughfare to your presence."

If you recognize any of these hindering obstacles on your spiritual road, I urge you to bring it before the Lord. In the end, he is the ultimate engineer for the spiritual highway.

Let us pray:

Lord, give us the strength, the wisdom, and the courage not only to bring our frustrations and concerns to you, but also to open ourselves to your guidance and inspiration. Allow us to become closer to you and serve Christ's kingdom with faith and hope. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

