

Are you Beyond Repair?...GOOD!
Sermon for CrossRoads March 1, 2009

It is said that in his later years Beethoven would spend hours playing a broken harpsichord...the fingers of a master dancing with precision over worn, chipped, and missing keys. The instrument was worthless. The strings were stretched. It was out of tune and harsh on the ears. Nonetheless, the great composer would play until tears streamed down his cheeks. To look at him, you'd think he was hearing a symphony. He was...we all understand Beethoven was deaf. Couldn't hear a note that the instrument played, but it didn't matter to the master because he was hearing the sound the instrument should make, not the one it made.

Have your life ever felt ever felt like Beethoven's harpsichord? Impossibly out of tune and out of step, like you're missing something vital? Ill-equipped? Inadequate? Unsightly before the master?

Have you ever wondered what God does when the instrument is broken? What happens to God's song in us when we forget to tune the strings of our hearts and lives to His symphony? How does the master respond when the keys he seeks to play just won't work? Does he turn and leave? Does he demand a replacement? Does he junk what doesn't work? Or does he patiently work the instrument until it begins to resonate the song he longs to hear...the one he made the instrument to play.

If you have ever asked questions like these we have something in common. We also have a common answer...

Last week Joyce and I shared from Jeremiah 6:16 focusing on standing at the Crossroads, Taking an honest look at our lives in light of God's desire for us, Asking for God's ancient paths, and deciding to move ahead in God's ways.

Our master has a symphony planned for our lives and it moves and flows with His eternal and sovereign purposes...yet, as God's instruments we are constantly found in some state of repair and restoration. God would tell us through the Bible that when we believe in Jesus, He sees in us what he created and not what we have become. And that's glorious.

But there is more. Have you ever wanted more? Been hungry for more? Wondered if there is more to believing? We can never get to the point of thinking or believing that repair is God's point for our lives. It seems the church has taught that everything centers on that initial act of believing Jesus. Forgiveness for our sin and the repair of sins damage on our relationship with God is a major point but it is the beginning point. It seems we are not expected to crave any further revelation of God to our souls. As if once God has found us, we need not seek more of God. God calls us to live beyond repair and that is what the ancient paths are all about.

Last week, as we approached the Crossroads and looked, before us was the image of ancient paths. They stood out for me and made me think...maybe for you too...what are the ancient paths? I was left wanting more depth regarding these ancient ways. I was hungry for more. So, I have wondered...on what paths would God call us to place the whole of our lives?...why is it plural? Is there more than one ancient path?

So...I spent some time mediating, studying, and praying about these questions.

First let's clarify that in today's spiritual climate many would say the image of ancient paths is plural because all religions are valid paths to God. To agree with this idea would be inconsistent with the rest of what the Bible says about knowing God and knowing God's gift of grace. God is a jealous God. We are made for him and his glory and will not share his glory with anything. As a rule, we must reject anything that is not consistent with God's word. If a teaching comes along that leads us away from what is revealed in scripture we must consider it a lie that God's enemy is using to seduce people away from finding and following God's ways. God is clear about who we are to worship, who we are to submit our lives to, what is to be authoritative in our lives, how we are to live...It is our job to know God's voice.

And just like that we have found two of the ancient paths...the first is following THE One True Living God. This is what made the people of Israel different from all nations. The other nations had lists of gods and made idols for them. When an army or people came and conquered it meant their god was more powerful so one's gods and idols changed. But Israel was called into relationship with the God of gods, the holy one, the One True Living God who does not change. The accompanying path is that of holiness. God is holy which basically means set apart or unique from everything else. It is a path that we walk in this world while our hearts and lives, decisions, hopes, priorities...everything belongs to God.

Following the one true God and living only for him are two of the ancient paths walked by Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, David, the prophets...and Jesus. So even as we see these tried and true paths before us Jeremiah says there are byways along it that lead away from the tried and true.

There are many in this world today that have no sense of direction in their lives, even many Christians who seem lost. It is as if they have wandered of the ancient way and are trying to find their own direction, destination, and fill in their own purpose. I believe more than ever is has a great deal to do with not knowing what Psalm 119 calls the light for the path and the lamp for the feet...the Bible. If we are going to follow the ancient ways we need a light. God knew that and gave us one that has essentially remained unchanged for centuries. Without that light for our direction we will replace it with another source and add what the world says is good and will give rest for the soul, provide direction, be trustworthy, and will give us security, things that make us feel like we know where our

lives are going...so we add a bit here and a bit there and pretty soon we have lost sight of our Lord. We've lost God's way and our way. Colossians 2:8-10 *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of [God] the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority*

Being lost is a terrible feeling, I have been lost and I know the fear that can grip your heart. The greatest danger in being lost is growing so tired of trying find your way that you just give up. It can be so hard and discouraging to walk where there is no path, progress is slow and frustrating all your energy is consumed in a short distance, all the focus is on you...and trying to get by. And then, when you come to a place of choices and decisions, even life changing decisions, we end up not sure where we really need to go. Being spiritually lost is a terrible feeling...it may have become more normal than we care to admit.

Max Lucado in "When God Whispers your name" shares this story. "I stand six steps from the beds edge. My arms extended. Hands open. On the bed, Sara –all four years of her – crouches poised like a kitten. She's going to jump. But she's not ready. I'm too close. "Back more Daddy" she stands and dares. I dramatically comply, confessing admiration for her courage. After two giant steps I stop. "More?" I ask. "YES!" Sara squeals, hopping of the bed. With each step she laughs and claps and motions for more. When I'm on the other side of the canyon, beyond the reach of mortal man, and when I'm a tiny figure on the horizon, she stops me. "There, stop there". "Are you sure?" "I'm sure", she shouts. I extend my arms. Once again she crouches, then springs. Superman without a cape. Skydiver without a chute. Only her heart flies higher than her body. In that airborne instant her only hope is her father. If he proves weak, she'll fall. If he proves cruel, she'll crash. If he proves forgetful, she'll tumble to the hard floor. But such fear she does not know, for her father she does know. She trusts him. Four years under the same roof have convinced her that he is reliable. And so she flies, and so she soars, And so he catches her and the two rejoice at the wedding of her trust and his faithfulness. (P 91-92)

Sara teaches us what the fathers have known through the centuries, that we walk on the ancient ways of **faith** and **trust** in God's faithfulness...and they keep us from getting lost. Paul said we are to fix our eyes on Jesus who gave us faith and perfects it. We are to follow him...not turning to the right chasing security and happiness in wealth or this world...or to the left, accommodating the teachings of false religions into our faith. All the while understanding that there are countless things, methods, philosophies, and voices clamoring for a follower...but these are the byways. There is just one true shepherd, the one name under the heavens by which we are saved.

This way of following Jesus and him alone invites on a journey along the paths of a **conscious and personal relationship with our One, true, living God**. In "The Pursuit

of God” A.W. Tozer says, “...For millions of Christians, God is no more real than He is to the non-Christian. They go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle. Over against all this cloudy vagueness stands the clear scriptural teaching that God can be known in a personal experience. A loving personality dominates the Bible, walking among the trees of the garden and breathing fragrance over every scene. Always, a living person is present, speaking, pleading, loving, working, and [revealing] himself...”

Max Lucado continues...“I stand a few feet from another bed. This time no one laughs. The room is solemn. A machine pumps air into a tired body. A monitor metronomes the beat of a weary heart. The man on the bed is no child. He was once. Many decades back. He was. But not now. Like Sara, he must trust. Only days out of the operating room and he’s been told he has to return. His frail hand squeezes mine. His eyes mist with a hint of fear and a knowing. Like Sara, he KNOWS his father is standing in the room. Trust Him, I say to us both. Trust the voice that whispers your name. Trust the hands to catch you. (adapted from Max Lucado When God Whispers your name, p.92-93)

I sit across the table from a good man. Good and afraid. His fear is honest. Stocks are down. Inflation is up...and he has payroll to meet, bills to pay. He hasn’t squandered or gambled or played. He has worked hard and prayed often, but now it’s time for a deep breath. Beneath the suit lies a breaking heart. He stirs his coffee and stares at me with the eyes of Wile E. Coyote when he realizes he has run beyond the edge of a cliff. He’s about to fall and fall fast. He’s Peter on the water, seeing the storm and not the face...but the face is there. He’s Peter in the waves, hearing the wind and not the voice...but the voice is speaking. Trust, I urge. (Lucado, When God Whispers your name, p.93)

Two stories of life that remind us that another one of the **ancient paths is a personal, trusting relationship** where it is God leading our way into his-story and that is how we must see ourselves...as walking with God in his-story no matter what the circumstances. It places us in the company of Moses, Isaac, Jacob and David, Jesus and his disciples. Knowing God fully is not possible. But we can know God and God’s personality and character. As we study God’s word and pray and listen and see God at work, and share our faith stories we begin to see that God is very present – as present in our lives as we will allow him to be.

Psalm 42 ¹ As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. ² I thirst for God, the living God. When can I go and stand before him?

So we have discovered a few of the ancient paths

- Of all the possible things in this world we give our selves to **live for the one true God and only for him**
- Sara reminded us that we walk in the ancient ways of **faith** and **trust** in God’s never ending faithfulness and we rejoice as they come together in our lives.

- We walk with God in his-story no matter what the circumstances in holy **and** **conscious, personal relationship** with our One, true, living God.

When we read our Bibles we come to know that the paths are already there for us – first created by our Father to lead us to where we are made to be...then walked by the millions of faithful who have gone before us, who share them with us today and those who will follow.

Jeremiah said the ancient paths are good and on them we will find rest for our souls. The master sees and hears what we can not...Jesus said it like this in Matthew 11 *Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. **Walk** with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.*"

When Jeremiah spoke of the ways to God as ancient. He used a word that has the meanings of tried and true, eternal, and concealed...difficult to find because they will not be encountered if desiring God is NOT the aim. Jesus said it like this *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.* Matthew 7:13-14

The message version: *Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention.*

These ancient ways of God are before us...waiting to be walked. To be sure we must all get beyond repair – beyond the thought that God's interest in me is limited to the forgiveness of my sin. Are we hungry and thirsty for more of God, longing for more, craving all God would become in our lives?

There is infinitely more of God to be known and lived...it is good and it is refreshing for our souls.

I challenge you this morning to get beyond repair and get on the path!

Amen