

*So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

*6As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. 2For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! 3We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, 4but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; 6by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, 7truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 8in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; 10as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.*

Behind the house where I grew up, across the fence, out in the pasture was the place for the cattle. I never knew one of them by name though they were my neighbors. They were steers, animals being raised for slaughter -next summer's steaks. No, I did not know them, but imprinted in my brain is their path. From here to there, from there to here they would travel single file. Day after day their hooves created a narrow path, a hard path where no grass would grow. A wandering path, up the hills and down into the valleys. In my mind I can still see the path that stretched from the barn to the woods.

As the years pass I sense how my life is like the path of the cattle. Once when I was young I thought the whole pasture was mine, I wandered here and there and thought most anything was possible. I actually would awaken in the morning thinking that today was the day that I wouldn't spend time grazing on the faults of others. I would not browse on the grasses of bitterness. I would not journey to valleys of anxiety, nor plot how to keep the tender shoots only for me. But by days end it seems I had meandered into the very places I had wanted to avoid. And life became more and more habit, the paths worn deeper and deeper.

We listen to our words. What paths do we walk? Complaining about them? That path is well worn, isn't it? Whites complaining about blacks, citizens complaining about irresponsible public officials, preachers complaining about the folks who take and take and never give. And for all the complaining no one ever lifts a finger to do anything, so that all that happens is the path is worn down deeper. Easier to walk it again tomorrow.

Today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of another Lent. What would it take for you and I to walk a new path?

“Return to me with all your heart,” says the Lord. “Rend your hearts and not your clothing.”

So we get down on our knees and we pray, and get up and wander down the same paths all over again. Sunday after Sunday, Lent after Lent, decade after decade.

What would it take to walk down a new path? St. Paul tells us: “If anyone is in Christ there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

But then he tells us: “All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ.”

Maybe the reason we walk down the same paths, graze the same pastures is because our hearts and our gaze are set upon ourselves - our hopes are set upon ourselves.

But if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation.

You are in Christ. God has prepared paths of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control upon which he leads you.

How can this be? This Ash Wednesday, this Lent, this moment, God wants you to feed upon Christ, to feast upon Christ, to drink in Christ - a new path for us - new food for us.

Ash Wednesday: A day to turn away from every well-worn path, every habit that is not full of praise and thanksgiving. Ash Wednesday: not so much to fix your heart upon your sin, but a day to fix your heart upon the love of God in Jesus Christ - to taste that love - to drink that love - o graze in the pasture of our Lord.

You and I do not have it in our power to leave those old paths. But Christ has it in his power to set us on a new way.

Let these forty days of Lent be a beginning for you. If you want to give up something during these days, then pray for the grace to give up complaining. Pray for the heart full of love instead of judging. Pray for the Spirit of Christ in you.

For you are a new creation in Christ.

Leave behind the old.

Walk in the new.





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