

Not too long ago, I was using a GPS map on my phone, and the map evidently had not been updated in a while, because it did not recognize the bridge that I was on. It showed me leaving the road and flying over the river, which was kind of neat, but not connected to reality at all, fortunately. The flip side of that is a scene from a well-known sitcom in which the main character refuses to deviate from the GPS instructions, even though it means driving right into a pond. In both cases, the point is the same. We need good directions, and we need to know that the directions we receive are trustworthy.

That’s true of driving, and that’s true of life. That’s what is promised in today’s reading from Isaiah. The Lord God promises trustworthy directions. He promises guidance for His people. This is great news for you and me, but we have to be ready for it. You have to be in the right frame of mind to receive it. Let me explain.

There has been a lot of stand-up comedy on the topic of male drivers who, under no circumstances, will stop to ask for directions. What’s the deal? Well, stopping and asking would mean you don’t know where you are. It would be an admission that you were lost. And what could be worse?

In a manner of speaking, this is the situation in which the people of Judah found themselves. Not that they were driving a car, obviously, but that they were lost, and didn’t want to admit it. God was a part of their lives; He was woven into the fabric of their nation, yet the fact of the matter was that many of the people had drifted away from Him. Other things had taken priority. Wealth and comfort were big ones. People craved both—and with wealth and comfort came a desperate drive for security to keep what they had. This desire became a functional god for many. It was what they trusted in most. But the unsettling, disturbing thing was that God kept sending prophets to wake them up and turn them around. In the moment, those prophets were easy enough to ignore—but the problem was, their words of warning kept coming true. What had once been one mighty nation was now split in two; enemy armies were a constant threat; the message was out there—return to the Lord, and He will deliver you—but so many people just...didn’t want to. To return and to change in the way they knew they would have to would mean admitting that they were lost. And what could be worse?

How do you reach people who are determined to go their own way—even if it means self-destruction? Here’s what God did in this case: He sent Isaiah with a message of incredible kindness and inexplicable patience. Through the prophet, God says, at the moment you look to me for help, I will bring it. Hear the words of Isaiah: “The Lord waits to be gracious to you...He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, “This is the way. Walk in it,” when you turn to the right...and the left.””

Did you hear all that? God promises help and guidance and His own presence. He is standing by, waiting to give those gifts. What is He waiting for? Isaiah tells us: “He will surely be gracious to you *at the sound of your cry*. As soon as he hears it, he answers you.” He was waiting for the people of Judah; He is waiting for us to cry out—to cry out that we are lost, after all—that we don’t know where we’re going—that we’ve tried other methods; we’ve made other things the functional trust of our hearts and they left us adrift, unfulfilled, just as off track as we were before. But now it’s time to come home. Through the prophet Isaiah, God says to people then and now, “I know the way. Come back to me and let me show you.”

This is a fantastic message to hear on a day when two of our young people are making confirmation of the gifts they received in baptism. Confirmation is saying, “Yes, I believe in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yes, I believe that He made me, redeemed me, and keeps me in faith. Yes, I want Him to teach me and guide me through life.” There is nothing to prevent any of us from confirming these same truths today, and it begins from that point of humility. I am lost without God, but I am not without God. He comes into my life through His Sacraments, adopting me in baptism and feeding me at His Table. He comes to me through His Word, His active, dynamic, living Word, which tells me the way to go. That same Word tells me who I am—who you are—in Christ, a person dearly loved by God, a priceless son or daughter of the King.

Isn’t it something—instead of God saying, “Come back to me or else,” through Isaiah he’s saying, “Come back to me so I can be good to you. Just admit you need me. You’re lost. Let me find you. Let me guide you.”

But, someone may ask, how can I trust that guidance? Well, please consider this. Isaiah spoke of a Teacher who was coming to share the ways of God. Six centuries later, Jesus arrived, telling vivid stories about the kingdom, and the people were amazed because He taught with authority. Isaiah spoke of a voice saying, “This is the way. Walk in it.” Six centuries later, Jesus said to his listeners, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

You see, “The way” is not trying really hard to live out a set of principles.

The Way is knowing a person. It is knowing Jesus. It is trusting that Jesus came and ate the bread of adversity and drank the water of affliction for us, on the cross. He swallowed down what was rightfully ours to take, so we could have life. Now your way home is paid for. What could be better?