

*Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls."*

In Christ Jesus, who is the same yesterday and today and forever, dear friends, redeemed through His blood,

At Immanuel Lutheran High School I have observed is that teenagers are on a hunting expedition. What they are hunting for is themselves. Previous to this, their identities were to home and family. As they enter their teens, they begin to search for a personal, individual identity. "Who am I? Where do I fit in?"

Part of this experience for many is a questioning of their personal beliefs. "Am I a Christian just because my parents are Christian? Is this why I am a Lutheran . . . a member of the CLC?"

In part this is why some young people abandon church after confirmation. As they question their personal faith, Satan comes along and robs them of whatever was in their hearts.

One of the reasons why parents send their children to ILC is so we can help them on their hunting expedition. The words of our text describe what we do. Likewise this is an exhortation for everyone of us to discover the right pathway and never take it for granted.

Hopefully, the search for each of us will end up in the same place, so that young and old alike we can utter the words of that negro spiritual:

#### GIMME THAT OLD TIME RELIGION

*Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls."*

Part of the problem for those who are questioning their personal beliefs is the fact that we live in a country where there are so many different religions.

A government website praises "the remarkable religious vitality of a society which supports some 2000 different religious denominations, and

in which more than 60 percent of the citizens can be found at least once a month in one of the almost 500,000 churches, temples and mosques which dot the landscape."

(<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/0397/ijse/ijse0397.htm>)

How does one decide? How does one choose? I have heard people say, "They really believe their religion, just like you really believe yours. So how am I supposed to know who is right and who isn't?" Or how about this: "There really isn't any right or wrong. If you believe one thing, that is your truth. If I believe something different, that is my truth."

Try that in a math class: "Well, teacher, the answer to one plus one is three; that is my truth. Your truth is that one plus one equals two. We are both right." Foolishness.

It is foolish also to believe that all religions are okay, even though they contradict each other in many different ways. Our Lord says: *Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!* (Is.5:20)

At this time of the year multitudes are going on vacation. Usually the objective for vacation is to gain some rest from our every day labors . . . rest for body and mind. People take different roads to achieve this. Some take the road to the mountains . . . others to the beach. Some go to a lonely place . . . others to a populated place. Different roads, but one objective: rest.

The religions of this world are like that. They present different roads to the same objective: rest for the soul. However, which road is going to reach that objective?

Are you standing at a crossroad in your spiritual life? Are you at a loss to determine which road that will bring rest for your soul? Well, God says, *"Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls."*

So here you stand, staring into your future. There is one road leading this way . . . another that way . . . one north . . . another south .

. . . *Stand in the ways and see, and ask* . . .

Don't just shrug your shoulders. Look carefully. Examine each road. Where is it actually leading? Do you really see rest for the soul on this road or that one?

A careful examination will show that there are not many roads. Actually, there are only two. It seems as though there are many. However, if we climb up a hill, we can see that all these roads, except for one, come together to form a single, wide road.

All religions, except one, preach the same so-called "truth." It is this: the only way to eternal rest is by your own doing. Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Shintoism, Taoism, Hinduism, Mormonism, Unitarianism, Catholicism, Jehovah's Witness-ism, etc.: all present a system of good deeds, by which you are supposed to get yourself to heaven or nirvana or a state of nihilism or some other view of the afterlife. They may disagree about what it is that you have to do, but they agree that YOU have to do it.

The one religion that doesn't go the same way as the others is the way of Christ, as He says: *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.* According to this religion, the Son of God did everything for you. You don't have to do anything. In Christ there is forgiveness for all the evil that you have done. In Christ there is righteousness for all the good that you have not done.

Stand and look. Look within yourself, also. Why are you questioning your beliefs? Is it because you are really in doubt? Or, is it because you want to lead a sinful life? Oh, how easy it is for us to deceive ourselves. Jeremiah says, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? (17:9)* We want to sin and then claim, "How was I to know? There are so many different religions. How was I to know that Christianity is the right one? How was I to know what is right and wrong?"

*Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.*

Ask for the old paths. To be more precise: the eternal paths . . . the everlasting road.

Islam began with Mohammed about 590 AD. Buddhism with Buddah about 500 BC. Taoism with Lao-Tse about 600 BC. Most religions of this world trace their beginnings back to a certain man, who developed its teachings. These religions did not exist prior to that time of those men.

What about our religion? Well, the author of our text, Jeremiah, lived before 600 BC and he talks about getting back to the old paths. His religion, which is also ours, precedes 600 BC.

In fact, Christianity traces its roots back to the beginning of time . . . actually, before the beginning. The Bible tells us that *the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world*. (Rev.13:8) Christianity is the only religion that is rooted in eternity.

Christianity is truly that old time religion. Adam and Eve looked for the Savior promised by God. Jesus said, *“Abraham rejoiced to see My day; he saw it and was glad.”* (Jn.8) In the 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm King David prerecorded the thoughts of Christ on the cross. Isaiah looked for a baby that would be born of a virgin and yet would be the mighty God. Micah looked for this baby to be born in Bethlehem. Truly this is that old time religion.

Of course, it is not the oldness of a religion that makes it right, even though the right religion has to be the oldest one in the world. *Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is.* . . . The good way: literally, “the way of the good.” The right religion is the one that leads us in the way of the good.

We toss around words like “good” and “bad” in a very subjective way: whatever seems good or bad at the moment; whatever feels good or bad. The religions of this world do the same thing. Good and bad are subjective, determined by the thoughts and feelings of human beings.

When the Bible talks about “the good,” it is not speaking subjectively, but objectively. The good are that which is intrinsically good . . . good in and of itself with no regard to what we think or how we feel. It is good because God says that it is good.

So what is the good of which our Lord speaks? Elsewhere in Scripture, the way of the good is called “the way of peace,” “the way of righteousness,” “the way of truth,” and “the way of salvation.” Peace,

righteousness, truth, and salvation: among all the religions of the world, which ones offer such a way?

The religions of the world offer ways of doubt, fear, wickedness, falsehood, and damnation. Righteousness is considered an impossibility. Salvation is something that they haven't even dreamed of.

The way of the good can be found only in the Christian religion. No other religion offers salvation from sin, death, and hell. Every other religion says that you have to work your own way out of your condemnation or else they say there is no hell.

Christianity alone tells us the truth about ourselves . . . and we know that it is the truth. The truth is that we are lost in our own sinfulness and condemned to eternal separation from God. We cannot save ourselves.

Christianity alone tells us the truth about God and by faith we Christians know that it is the truth. The truth about God is this that before the world was ever created, the Father loved us sinners with a love so great that He gave His only begotten Son to pay the price for our sins. Then He sent His Holy Spirit to bring us to faith in His Son, assuring us that whoever believes in Jesus is saved . . . forever saved from sin, death, and hell . . . forever delivered to the joys of heaven.

Here is that old time religion. Are you going to repeat the refrain: "Give me that old time religion"?

*Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where way of the good is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. We have stood; we have looked; we have asked. Now, by the grace of God we will walk on that path of the good.*

The only way that we can walk on the everlasting pathway of the good is by faith. Jesus said, *In My Father's house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . . where I go you know, and the way you know. . . I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.* (Jn.14) All who believe in Jesus are walking on the everlasting way that leads to the eternal mansions in heaven.

By the grace of God, you and I have found what the Lord promises: rest

for our souls. Jesus gave the promise: *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden . . . and you will find rest for your souls.* (Matt.11:28ff)

Jesus is the fulfilment of the words of our text. He and He alone is the way of rest . . . rest in the knowledge that our sins are forgiven, that we are fully righteous in the sight of God, and that there is a place reserved for us in heaven. Jesus has accomplished all of this for us by living, dying, and rising again to glory.

Are you among those who are questioning your beliefs? The answer to your questions is this: "Give me that old time religion." Show me the everlasting pathway, which is Christ, so that by faith I walk in it and find rest for my soul.