

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

I was walking in Turkey Run State Park a few months ago and decided to try something different. It seems like what usually happens is that, when I cross the bridge to the other side of Sugar Creek, I always end up on trail 3—the one with the deep gorge.

Last time I noticed that there was another trail, #4, that goes upstream along the creek. I don't know if I had ever even been on it, so I gave it a try. I don't know how, but I got lost. Not deep in the brush kind of lost, but still I wasn't sure if I was even on a trail at some points.

Eventually, I came out by one of the covered bridges and discovered that I really had not been on trail 4 at all. There was a sign indicating that #4 was up a head, but I wasn't on it.

To this day I still don't know what happened. When the weather warms up I'm going back to try to figure it all out.

Today's first reading gives us a picture of a people who have regained the trail, or gotten back on the path, so to speak.

It had been a long time coming. The festive liturgy of reading the Law to the people and commenting on it was the culmination of about 200 years of Israelite history, beginning with when they were exiled to Babylon, the 70 years they dwelt there, the change in world power and the decision by the Cyrus, the new ruler to let them go back, the long and arduous effort to rebuild the city and then the temple, until finally, on the day Ezra got up and read to the people, they could truly say, "We are finally back on the path to being the

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

light to the nations God had always intended for us to be.

They were overcome with emotion—both the kind of emotion that comes with recognizing all that it had cost them to have strayed from the Lord, and, as Ezra exhorts them, to be filled with joy. They had, after all, found the path forward again, and staying on the path—staying close to God, would be their strength.

In the Gospel, Jesus gives his first proclamation of what God is doing in their midst. He makes the remarkable assertion that the Scriptures are being fulfilled right then and there, rather than reading them as if they were just recounting a past or pointing to a distant future.

Jesus is opening the path to his people again: God is not just a God who worked way back when or one who makes a lot of promises that never seem to be fulfilled. His grace is in our midst. We dare not miss it for fear of losing our way.

We can lose our way if we think of our faith as only having to do with getting to heaven, as if this world did not have its own value.

We can lose our way if we think that everything God has planned has already been completed and we are basically on our own from here on out.

We can lose our way if we think that this is as good as its going to get: eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

The path that God has set us on has two dimensions: it is

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

marked out for us, and it actually goes somewhere.

In theological language we speak of that as “already and not-yet.” We are already being saved—we and the world. Grace is already present in our lives, sustaining us, enlivening us, giving us what we need to respond to God’s love.

And yet, this is not the whole story. God is calling us forward into a fullness of life that goes beyond what we can even hope for or imagine.

This already and not-yet character of the Christian way keeps us from despair—God has not left us orphaned—and it keeps us from becoming complacent and forgetting that this is not a good as it can get.