

Roadside Assistance

Text: Psalm 119:9-16

Hymn: "The Light Is Ever Night"

*How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.
-Psalm 119:9*

Earlier this summer, both the cover and the main article of the British magazine *The Spectator* were devoted to the sexual counterrevolution taking place in America and elsewhere. The article, written by Mary Harrington, highlights two young people, one, a 23-year-old Harvard graduate named Charlotte, the other, a highly educated, very successful thirty-year-old bachelor referred to as Narayan. Both are pushing back, the author writes, "against a culture of sexual freedom they see as toxic not just to individual wellbeing, but even to the long-term health of American society." Charlotte, for example, has embraced "modest dress" (nothing that exposes her legs above the knee), and has deleted all revealing photos of herself on social media. Narayan, for his part, lives a chaste life and seeks to marry a woman who has lived likewise.

But holding such values comes at a price. Charlotte told the author that when she got engaged her senior year at Harvard, "My peers looked at me 'like I was crazy' for expressing a preference for children over a high-flying career." Narayan said that because of the qualities he's looking for in a wife, he's been accused of woman-hating. In fact, Narayan would not consent to having his real name published, because, he said, "voicing any of this stuff openly is just social suicide."

I am sure that many here today can relate to the challenges and pressures of these honest young people. They are not unique. Just about any of us born since the 1960s and who have made it at least to middle school have faced the same situation.

And not just with respect to keeping the sixth commandment. We are living in a culture that has voluntarily given itself over to excess in every way imaginable—to alcohol and drugs, to materialism, to pleasure, to vanity.

While not everybody agrees what constitutes good moral values, very few would disagree that our society's moral standards have changed dramatically during the past several decades. When at home dad and mom scold you for saying "stupid" but everybody at school and on television gets laughs and applause for taking God's name in vain and for using words fighting men would blush to hear, it's no wonder young people are confused, crying out, searching for a standard, for guidelines to order their lives by. David addresses this very need when he asks the question in Psalm 119, "How can a young person keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word." By letting oneself be guided by the Word of God.

How can you know what is right and how to live? If you, especially a young person, are bewildered and confused about all the pressures put on you and feel coerced at times into making decisions you don't care for, God promises to give you strength to stand up and say no. Don't give in to the forces of evil. There's another way. The Word of God, as we read later in Psalm 119, is a shining lamp for your feet, a light for your path, so that you don't stumble during the challenging years ahead (v 105).

Perhaps the biggest stumbling block to giving God's Word a hearing is the devil's deception that being a child of God automatically means living an unhappy and unexciting life. Many young people avoid anything religious because of this lie. Others mistakenly think that being a Christian means giving up all the good things in life and putting up with a boring existence. The t-shirt that reads, "Good girls go to heaven.

Bad girls go anywhere they want.” And yet how many athletes and entertainment celebrities have given public witness to the fact that their new lives as Christians have provided more happiness and meaning than when they were trying to find fulfillment hooking up or by abusing their bodies through alcohol and drugs. Don’t run with the crowd and accept the values of the world. Listen to those who have been there, even those who are not even Christian. They will tell you that it seems good at first but that the final result is frequently terrible guilt and grief and sometimes even despair.

Today is Rally Day, where we kick off a new Sunday School year and highlight the importance and great gift of growing up under the blessed influence of God’s Word. I thought it fitting, therefore, to focus on a younger demographic. But, of course, the message is for everyone, old and young. There are many of you who, hearing these words, realize you’ve already made many mistakes. The Word for you is “Don’t give up!” The Gospel is a message of forgiveness and hope for sinners. Jesus pointedly said that He came not to heal those who were already well but those who were sick. He came not to save the righteous but sinners. God loves us in spite of what we’ve done. And what He wants more than anything is for us to accept that forgiveness, to run from our sin and then to live with his constant assurance of His love and mercy toward us.

Returning to the topic we started with, there is nothing wrong with the gift of sexual desire. Is one of God’s good gifts to his human creatures. What is wrong is the abuse of it. Any such activity outside of marriage is an abuse of God’s wonderful gift. We, of course, have a hard time accepting that word. Sin always distorts God’s words in such a way that we hear them as coming from a spoilsport, the way the devil persuaded Eve to believe that God was out to get her by withholding from her the fruit

from that one tree. But God made us! God is good. God is gracious. Even in the giving of his commandments. They are there for our help and our blessing. They are instructions from the manufacturer on how best to operate the body and mind He himself created so that you might get longer use out of it, or as God promises to those who honor their father and mother, that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth (Ex 20:12).

Yes, God graciously gives us the Ten Commandments for our benefit. For the baptized believer, these guidelines aren't a burden (1 Jn 5:3). God doesn't give these commandments to make our lives unhappy or dull. He gives them so we can live a life pleasing to Him, a life in which we are at peace with ourselves and with the people around us. Now they're certainly easier to read than to remember, easier to preach than to practice. And Christians can never follow them perfectly. But here is precisely where the joy of being a Christian comes in. We don't labor under the law but live in freedom under the Gospel. Even though you and I may fall, God still loves us. He forgives us and provides us with the strength to live a more holy life. After St. Paul himself expressed his frustration with his own failure to do that which he knew should do, he rejoiced in God's grace by proclaiming, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Young Christians, I'm sure you would admit that you have not always lived a life pleasing to God. The treatment you've given other family members, the attitude you've shown your parents hasn't always been God-pleasing. You may have run with a crowd or participated in things you knew were wrong. And, yes, it's difficult to say no as a young person. At your age, the devil uses every trick and power he can to work on your

emotions, your hormones, your desire to fit in. And Satan will exploit any weakness you may have. That's what you're up against. But have no fear. God is greater than the devil. This was proven once for all when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead. Jesus did not remain in the grave. He rose again on the third day! And the same power which God used to raise Jesus from the dead He gives to you in your struggle against the temptations of the devil. The devil may snarl and growl, but God has him on a leash!

So, with the certain knowledge of victory, say no to Satan's temptations. Confess your past mistakes to God. Live in the grace and mercy of your heavenly Father. That word of forgiveness you heard proclaimed unequivocally earlier in the service applies to you and all your sins! In a difficult situation, remember the example of young Joseph who said no to the wife of his master, who asked him to go to bed with her. "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God!" (Gn 39:9) For his faithfulness, he was placed in jail, but God later blessed him richly. Remember the example of young Daniel, tested with more trials than most young people could ever imagine. But because of his desire to do what God said was right, God blessed him. He even miraculously protected him in a den filled with hungry lions (Dan 6).

So, as you leave this place today and face a world where the values are so confused and the devil is ruining the lives of so many, know that God stands besides you and strengthens you. He will do it for us as he did for believers in times past. He even promises that He will not permit us to be tempted with more than we can endure (1 Cor 10:13). We need not be frightened. "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 Jn 4:4). The Savior lives in you by faith. Don't try to make it alone.

Trust in the power of Jesus. He is the one who defeated the devil and overcame death in order to be raised again on Easter morning. Abiding in His word you, too, will be enabled to travel safely, peacefully, joyfully down the road that God has not only put you on but keeps you on unto eternal life. "How will a young person keep his way pure? By guarding it according to the Word of God." Amen.

Pastor Brent McGuire
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church