

Grace and peace are yours from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I don't remember learning how to walk. I can walk. I mean—I have the ability to walk. And I can't remember a time when I couldn't walk—there were maybe one or two times when I twisted an ankle or fractured a bone and had a hard time getting around. But for the most part, throughout my life, I've been walking without a problem. For that, I am thankful. I couldn't tell you how old I was or how long it took me to learn to walk. God's given me this seemingly-simple, yet very helpful skill, but I don't remember learning how to walk.

Do you remember? If you can walk, you must have learned at some point. But can you say when it happened? Where were you when you took your first steps, when someone sat on the floor to encourage you, to guide you? And along the way, there were accidents—you fell backward and forward. You hit furniture with your head and fell back to crawling when walking got too tricky. Who picked you back up when you fell? Who held your hand as you graduated from crawling to standing to walking to running? Who gave you these fundamental life skills? Maybe your mom or dad or an older sibling could tell you if you don't already know.

Walking is just one of many skills many of us take for granted. Besides walking, who taught you to speak, to eat, to ask people for help, to make friends? These skills are so natural to who we are. Who taught you how to be you?

The text from Ephesians in front of us today tells us more. Ephesians 2 tells us something more about the way we walk—the fundamental way we behave, the way we *are* as living, breathing Christians in this dead and sinful world. Paul makes it clear in this reading that God is the one who showed us how to walk. Paul writes that God makes us Christian. God gives us faith. By grace, **God teaches us how to walk**. In the first verses of the reading, Paul explains **how we used to walk**. Then, in the second part, Paul rejoices in **how we walk today** as Christians.

Part 1: In the first part of the Ephesians reading, Paul writes about how we used to walk. And this is before we were Christians, before God brought us to faith. He writes that before faith, we were *dead in our sins*, walking in the world's ways. So, Paul is saying that, before God, it was *the world* that taught us how to walk. We were born into the world with a sinful nature, and *the world* was our first teacher. And the world is a poor teacher. The world can't teach us what our reading teaches, what all of God's Word teaches. The world can't teach about God's mercy, his love, the gift of His Son. The world can't teach about salvation by grace, through faith, which makes us alive. The world can't tell us what this season of Lent is all about. In Lent, we take time to consider our sin, the depth of our sin, and especially what Jesus had to do to pay for that sin. In Lent, we take time to consider Jesus' suffering and dying. The world doesn't take the time. The message of Christianity is foolish to the world.

The world doesn't hold onto Christ and his resurrection as the one sure hope, the salvation from sin. The world sees no need for Christ. For much of the world, sin is not such a bad thing. The world will say sin is something you only have to worry about if you've done something like murder or adultery or just the words and actions that hurt other people, but Ephesians teaches us something different. The world will teach that, as long as you do the best you can, if you're nice to the people around you, if the "sins"

you do don't really hurt anyone, then you're OK. There is no hope in those words. They'll say you have something good to look forward to after you die. But they have no certainty in what they say. What they teach is not correct. Ephesians—God's Word—teaches something different. It teaches something better. It teaches something certain.

Today, we walk as children of God, but Paul reminds us that we did not always walk in this way. In fact, we used to walk in the ways of "the ruler of the kingdom of the air," who is "the spirit at work in those who are disobedient," as Paul writes. This "ruler" is the devil. To walk in the way of the world is to walk in the way of the devil. This is a dangerous, deadly walk. The devil, like the world, is a poor teacher. There is no hope in the way he walks, as he leads people away from God and away from a relationship with him. There is only hope with Christ. Without Christ, we were dead in transgressions and sins. Without Christ, we were by nature "deserving of wrath." With Christ, *we are alive in his resurrection*. With Christ, we walk how God teaches us to walk.

I don't remember learning how to walk, but I must have learned something from my dad. Over the years, I've heard comments from people who knew my dad. Comments like: "Wow, you move just like your dad." "Wow, out of the corner of my eye, I really thought it was your dad coming this way." A lot of it probably comes down to genetics; a lot of it probably comes down to being around my dad in the same house growing up, seeing him walk. I've inherited the way I walk. Maybe you've heard similar comments about you and your mom or dad. Maybe you see yourself in your kids or grandkids. And not just in the way they walk or run, but in their mannerisms, the language they use, their personalities. So much is passed down from generation to generation.

From generation to generation comes not only the way we move and look but also, from generation to generation, comes our sinful nature. Paul makes it abundantly clear that we were, by nature, deserving of wrath. By nature, we were dead in transgressions and sins. By nature, we would "gratify the cravings of our flesh and follow its desires and thoughts." We are by nature cut off from God, unable to do anything to come to him. We are dead. These first few verses in Ephesians are dropping some heavy stuff on us! But Paul has much more to say. Today's reading is far from over. Paul talks about how depraved and sinful we were, because Paul has one thought on his mind throughout the text. He wants you to know the power of *God* that is at work in you. Nothing *you* do has anything to do with your relationship with God. Nothing *you* do can earn your place in heaven. So don't worry about that. Nothing *you* do can rip you from the promises God has made to you. God made you alive through his gospel in Word and sacrament. He made you his own. *God* does it all.

By nature, we used to walk in the way of the world. This was a dangerous, sinful path that could only lead to death. Today, we walk in the way God teaches us. Today, by faith, we walk a joyful path that only leads to eternal life.

Part 2: The only reason we aren't still dead in our transgressions and sins, obedient to our sinful nature, is because of God. The verses in front of us find many ways to make it so clear that *God* is responsible for the eternal life we enjoy. Not because of anything you've done, but God loves you do you walk as a Christian. Not because you earned it, but because God is rich in mercy do you have a relationship with

him. You have been made alive, and have the signs of life. Not because you deserve God's love, but because God shows you grace you are saved.

Through God's love, by grace, you are *made alive with Christ*. When God called you to faith in baptism, God attached you to Christ and everything he has done. Christ conquered death and has brought you with him into eternal life. To show his love and kindness, God has attached you to Christ, and there's no better place to be. You are already raised with Christ and seated with him in heaven, Paul tells us. That work is already done. You are already victors with Christ. Sin doesn't bother you. Death doesn't bother you. The sinful nature that's been passed down to you—that is no longer your concern. Peace and joy and relief from guilt are yours.

God has been planning this for a long time. Like expecting parents, who plan ahead for their child to come into the world, for that child to reach those milestones—scooting, crawling, standing, walking—like these parents, so did God plan for you to come into his family. The final verse of this portion of Ephesians says that God “prepared in advance” for you to come to faith. From before you were born, he prepared in advance for you to walk in his ways.

God planned to rescue you from the way you were walking in the *world* to have you walk according to his *Word*. Today, you are no longer under the power of sin and the devil. Today, your salvation is not a question. It's not a question of whether or not you've done enough to earn salvation. Your salvation is not in question if you've committed some sin you've felt guilt over for years. Your life rests securely in faith—a gift from God to you. It is by grace you have been saved, through faith. You were dead in sin; you deserved God's wrath. But God is rich in mercy. Everything we deserved has come undone. We deserved damnation, but now we have salvation. We deserved only death, but now we have been made alive. Life on earth will take its toll, but nothing will separate you from the God who sent his Son to save you through him.

God has been with you since the beginning, graciously giving you faith so that you could be his child—so that you could learn to walk from him. And he is with you today, guiding you as you walk, and when you stumble. Brothers and sisters, walk now, following Christ, in whom we live eternally. Amen.

And may the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.