

When Joan and I took our son Steve to the airport on Wednesday to catch his flight to Miami, we saw accidents, spin outs and traffic backups on West bound I-94. We knew we didn't want to come back that way, so Joan pulled out the map and started looking for an alternate path. We took surface streets all the way back to the church. It was a new path we had never taken before, but it worked because we never did get caught in any of the long backups on the highway.

2009 promises to be a year with a lot of changes, a number of new paths for people to follow. The Detroit Auto Show gives us a glimpse of the new path the Big Three are taking. The Inauguration of President Obama will mark the start of a new path for our government and our nation. I think a lot of us will discover that we are on an unexpected path before this year is over. What path are you on? Are you going the right direction? Jesus calls us to follow Him. Are we?

Many of the people in Israel were not on the right path during the time of Eli, the priest. The people were supposed to be ruled by a "Tribal Theocracy," where the Elders of each tribe were to lead the people according to God's laws. Unfortunately it didn't work because the people didn't follow God's laws. Judges 17:6 (NLT) tells us, ***"In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes."***

Eli's sons were no better than the people. They should have followed in their father's footsteps, but denied God's call. Instead of correcting the people and setting a good example, Eli's sons made things worse. 1 Samuel 2:12 reads, ***"Eli's sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the LORD."*** They disobeyed the Lord's commands by taking the best parts of the sacrifices the people brought for themselves and by having sexual relationships with the women who served at the tabernacle. They could have easily led the people in a call for tolerance instead of justice, for acceptance instead of obeying God's commands.

This was the setting that Samuel found himself in. His mother dedicated him to the Lord and brought him to the Tabernacle where he grew both physically and spiritually. One night Samuel heard a voice calling him. At first Samuel thought it was Eli, but it wasn't. Eli told Samuel to wait for the voice to call out to him again. That time Samuel responded, ***"Speak, your servant is listening."*** (1 Samuel 3:10, NLT)

This was the first step down a new path for Samuel, a path in which God would use Samuel to call the people of Israel to repentance and faith. Samuel shows us that the first step on the new path is to listen to the voice of the Lord. We are here today to listen to the voice of the Lord. You can hear God speak to you every time you open your Bible, read His Word, and take it to heart.

At the start of His public ministry, Jesus called disciples to follow Him. He called Philip who not only said yes to Jesus but found Nathanael and invited him to follow Jesus, too. Nathanael was hesitant at first to follow Jesus, but after meeting the Lord and talking with him, Nathanael accepted the invitation. These disciples show us the next two steps on the new path of faith. After listening to God's voice, they respond positively to his call and tell others the Good News.

God's followers know and believe Jesus when He says, ***"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*** (John 14:6) They follow Him by walking along the path of faith with Him. Followers of Christ also know that they are called out of the world, called to live a new life. 1 Peter 2:4 tells us, ***"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."***

This is not the description of people who do their own thing without any thought for the Lord and His will. This is a description of people who respond to God's love in their lives by loving Him back and spreading His love to others. Christians should think and act differently. It doesn't mean that Christians should think they are better than anyone else or look down on other people. That should never happen. God loves all people. We all need God's love and forgiveness. But it does mean that we are called to live a new life. Jesus ate with the tax collectors and sinners, but He didn't join them in their sinful actions. We shouldn't either.

The followers of Christ are told to stop sinning, to stop following the crowd, and to take the new path of faith and faithfulness. Why? 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 tells us, ***"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."*** So our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. God lives inside of us. Secondly, we've been bought with a price. Jesus gave up His life for us to give us a new life. He paid the price that we could never pay to give us the gift that we could never afford. He loves and forgives us. The love of God changes us. So we should honor God with how we live. We should not follow Eli's sons who dishonored God by sleeping around. We should not follow those in Corinth who were guilty of sexual immorality. We should not follow people today who dishonor marriage by having sexual relations before marriage or with someone outside of marriage.

We are called to take a different path. So listen to God's call, answer Him positively, and extend the invitation. Remember that God paid a great price for you. He has invested himself in you, so honor him in the way that you live. Amen.