

WALK THIS WAY

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

In Mel Brooks's classic movie, *Young Frankenstein*, Dr. Frederick Frankenstein (pronounced "Fronkonsteen") waits on the railroad platform after arriving in Transylvania on a dark and foggy night. Scared when he hears a mysterious clumping and swishing sound, the good doctor soon finds himself face to face with the bug-eyed man who was sent to meet him.

The ensuing dialogue has become a classic bit of movie history:

Dr Frankenstein?

Fronkonsteen.

You're putting me on.

No. It's pronounced Fronkonsteen.

Do you also say Frodorick?

No. Frederick.

Well, why isn't it Frodorick Fronkonsteen?

It isn't. It's Frederick Fronkonsteen.

I see.

You must be Igor.

No. It's pronounced I-gor.

But they told me it was Igor.

Well, they were wrong then, weren't they?

As they prepare to leave the train platform, I-gor pulls out a short walking stick, turns to Dr. "Fronkonsteen," and says, "Walk this way." I-gor shuffles down the three steps, then hands the cane to the doctor, nods his head, and says, "This way." As Dr. "Fronkonsteen" struggles down the steps, he pauses and looks off into the distance, with an expression that seems to say, "I can't believe I'm doing this!"

When Mel Brooks was editing the film, he wanted to cut the "Walk this way" scene because he thought it was too corny. However, after test audiences absolutely loved the gag, Brooks left it in the movie and, as they say, the rest is history. "Walk this way" became one of Mel Brooks's best known jokes from his many comedies.

Although I seriously doubt Mel Brooks intended to include any biblical reference in *Young Frankenstein*, "Walk this way" plays an important role in the New Testament, especially in the letters of the Apostle Paul. And, when we hear Jesus and Paul say "Walk this way," and we actually try to "walk this way," we might find ourselves looking off into the distance and thinking, "I can't believe I'm doing this!"

Case in point – here’s how Paul describes the Christian life and God’s calling in our lives:

- “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life.” (Romans 6:4)
- “so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:4)
- “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7)
- “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand in order that we might walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10)
- “I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-3)
- “For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light.” (Ephesians 5:8)
- “urging and encouraging you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.” (1 Thessalonians 1:12)

When you read some of those verses, and many more, in the New Testament, you will find something like “way of life” or “lead a life worthy of the Lord.” That’s the way my Bible translates one verse (v. 10) in today’s epistle lesson: “so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.” (Colossians 1:10) Here’s how the English Standard Version (and others) translate that phrase: “so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” A good Greek verb that literally means “walk around” is used to describe how we as Christians are called to conduct our lives and to be occupied with our Lord. You might think in terms of “walk the talk, walk the walk.”

. . . and that is Paul’s prayer for the Colossian Christians. He had heard about their faith, love, and hope, and he prayed that they would be filled “with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.” The knowledge of God’s will and the spiritual wisdom and understanding are not ends in themselves, nor are they just for our own personal salvation, gratification, and use. Rather, that knowledge and wisdom is to be used to do good works, to bear fruit which, as Paul told the Ephesian believers, “God prepared beforehand to be the way we walk through this life.” (Ephesians 2:10)

We are to walk this way – worthy of the Lord – so we can bear fruit in this world. Two weeks ago, we read Paul’s list of the “fruit of the Spirit,” his description of what it means to live for and love God and our neighbor: “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. . . If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:22-23, 25)

We hear a lot about the U.S. Constitution these days. Did you know that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a two-part constitution? Part I is our *Book of Confessions*, a collection of twelve confessions of faith, creeds, and catechisms that proclaim what we believe and why. Part II is our *Book of Order*, which is sort of like our manual of operations, although it begins with the biblical and theological reasons for how we govern ourselves the way we do in the Presbyterian Church. Our two-part constitution is a lot like Paul's letters. Typically, he spends the first half of his letters talking about everything God has done for us in Jesus Christ and then, in the second part, he says, "Therefore . . . because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, live like this/walk this way."

One of the "Historic Principles of Church Order" that guide how we live together as a community of faith and walk the walk/walk the talk as believers is called "Truth and Goodness." It reads this way: "That truth is in order to goodness; and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness, according to our Savior's rule, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' And that no opinion can either be more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level, and represents it as of no consequence what a man's opinions are. On the contrary, we are persuaded that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise it would be of no consequence either to discover truth or to embrace it."¹

As part of my responsibilities as a member of the East Commission on Ministry of the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina, I organize the examinations of ministers who are being called into our presbytery to serve churches. Those ministers are asked to select two of the questions asked at the ordination of ministers and elders and to reflect on their meaning. Last Tuesday, our exam team met with a minister who will be moving into our presbytery. Here is one question he selected: *Will you in our own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?* And here is part of his answer: "When I read these words, I am reminded of the judgment of the nations in Matthew 25, when Jesus asks the crowds gathered before him if they have fed, clothed, welcomed, and visited those in need. When you do these things, you do them for the king of the world. The reconciliation of the world doesn't care what you think or believe. It cares about the concrete steps you are taking to make the world a better place." When I asked him to elaborate on his answer, I said, "The reconciliation of the world doesn't care what you think or believe, but what we think and believe certainly matters. What do you mean?" In so many words, he talked in terms of bearing fruit, walking the walk/walking the talk, and walking worthy of the Lord. Here's how another minister said the same thing: "Right knowledge issues in right behavior. Knowing the truth of the Gospel leads to a life worthy of the God who gave us his only Son so that we can bear fruit. Knowledge issues in deeds. Wisdom yields righteousness. . . The Son of God who was made flesh is interested in what we do with our own flesh, and if righteousness and holiness do not show up in every aspect of our lives, something is wrong."²

John Wesley was the 18th century leader of the reform movement within the Church of England that came to be known as Methodism and, later, the independent Methodist Church. It is said that Wesley asked three questions of would-be preachers, ministers, and other leaders of the Methodist movement: Have they faith? Have they

gifts? Have they fruit? That last question could be expanded: “Was there at least one person who had found faith through the word they proclaimed? A single person whose spiritual practices had been enlivened by what they taught? A hungry person who found bread? A homeless person who found shelter? Was there any sign that the ministry exercised by this person was waking the world to the dream of God?”³

But why restrict that question – Have they fruit? – to individuals? You can’t see or hear it in the English, but when Paul talks about “you” in his letters, he means (as we would say it around here) “y’all.” He talks to the body of Christ, the community of faith, the church about what it means to walk worthy of the Lord and to do good works “which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in.”

So, we can certainly hear Paul’s exhortation to walk worthy of the Lord and to bear fruit in the world as a word about how we should each live out our faith. But what if we hear his words as a congregation trying to discern God’s will and live faithfully in these days?

Here is a provocative take on Wesley’s question, “Have they fruit?” which it would do us good to consider as a congregation: “It’s also not a bad question for congregations to ask themselves. Imagine the discussion that would ensue at the next {session} (*sic*) meeting if the question were asked, ‘Have we fruit?’ Imagine the conversation if the topic at the meeting became, ‘What evidence is there? What can we point to that demonstrates that the community in which we live is better, healthier, and more faithful because of the presence of our church? Are our ministries making any kind of difference to our neighbors? Is the Spirit, through us, actually changing lives, deepening faith, seeding hope in this neighborhood? Or are we just taking up space on a corner in town, an antiquated placeholder on this block?’”⁴

Friends, walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. . . For “God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:13-14) Or, as the hymn in *Glory to God* says, “I want to walk as a child of the light, I want to follow Jesus. God sent the stars to give light to the world, The star of my life is Jesus.”⁵

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, you have rescued us from the power of darkness. Help us to walk in this world as citizens of your kingdom of light where Christ reigns as King in glory for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

¹*Book of Order 2019-2021: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II* (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly), F-3.0104.

²Scott Hoeszee, “Sermon Commentary for Sunday, July 10, 2016: Colossians 1:1-14” at www.cepreaching.org.

³Nathan Kirkpatrick, “Have we fruit?” Monday, July 5, 2010 at www.faithandleadership.com.

⁴*Ibid.*, edited to reflect our Presbyterian form of government by a session.

⁵Hymn #377, “I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light,” *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*, by Kathleen Thomerson.