

The Rev. Robert H. Malm
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Good Friday

The Way of Love

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has encouraged us in our discipleship by following “The Way of Love.” Of course, it is Jesus who shows us the way of love. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me...” (John 14:6) In fact, the First Century Christian community was known as “The Way.” (See Acts 9:2, 24:14)

Bishop Curry has seven practices that make up this “way of love.” We reflected upon these during our Lenten Monday Night program.

1. Turn – to Jesus. Turn away from all that distracts you from seeing Jesus. The biblical word is “repent” which means to turn or change.
2. Learn – Grow in your understanding of Jesus’ teaching; learn from scripture. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you into new truths.
3. Pray – Spend time with God, daily, on your own. Use a variety of practices. Prayer is responding to God, with or without words.
4. Worship – Gather in community. Share in the Body of Christ. Remember Jesus’ words, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Our worship is centered in the Holy Eucharist.
5. Bless – Share your faith with others. Give, serve, help.
6. Go – out into the world. Witness to God wherever you find yourself.
7. Rest – Receive God’s blessing of peace. Renew and refresh. Attend to your physical and emotional health.

Bishop Curry has given us encouragement to deepen our discipleship. He knows the Cross is the foundation of our discipleship. On Good Friday we proclaim the Cross to be the “Way of Love.”

Recently I looked through a book written 28 years ago by George Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury. Bishop Carey wrote these words about the Cross: “The way of Love. When we look at the Cross it does tell us how much God loves us. Love is only fully understood by what it does. We only know love when it is expressed in action... Christ’s example is ... costly, redemptive, self-emptying love; love which lays down its life for others.”¹

The Passion narrative shows us how the Cross is the way of love. The Cross is hope, mystery, trust, power. St. Paul writes, “...the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God...” (1 Cor 1:18)

And, in the words of a Sixth Century Bishop translated into a hymn, “Blest tree whose chosen branches bore the wealth that did the world restore, the price which none but He could pay to spoil the spoiler of his prey. O Cross, our one reliance hail! Still may thy power with us avail to save us sinners from our sin, God’s righteousness for all to win.” (see Hymnal 162)

The power, the glory we see in Christ on the Cross is the power, the glory, the way of love. St. John does not use the word “love” in his Passion narrative. He has already told us about God’s love in Jesus and in the love Jesus shares with the disciples. This same love will sustain, empower the disciples after Jesus is gone.

Of course, it all begins with John telling us “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (3:16) Jesus criticizes the Jewish religious leaders for not having the love of God within them (5:42). John uses the word “love” almost 20 times in the Farewell Address of Jesus, after the Last Supper (chapters 13-17). Jesus gives the disciples a “new commandment,” symbolized in the washing of feet – “Love one another, as I have loved you...” As John describes the Passion, we see how we are to love one another; we see the way of love.

Bishop Curry uses seven “practices” for his “Way of Love.” The Church looks to Jesus’ seven last words, his last sayings from the Cross, to see the way of love. We heard three of these sayings last Sunday from St. Luke’s Passion narrative. Luke’s story shows us Jesus’ complete trust in God, a trust built upon prayer and healing.

1. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). The way of love from the Cross begins with forgiveness. This is Jesus’ way – in life, in death, in resurrection. Peter understood this grace of forgiveness. He knew Jesus’ forgiveness, so he could forgive himself and he could lead the disciples, even after his denials of Jesus. Judas never understood Jesus’ way of love, way of forgiveness, so he killed himself.
2. “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). A dying criminal receives hope from Jesus. Hope, as the way of love, liberates the oppressed, lifts those in despair, those who are outcasts: slaves, prostitutes, tax collectors, lepers, criminals, Samaritans and – in the First Century – women and children, the poor. Who in our world today needs to hear his word of hope?
3. “Woman, here is your son. Here is your mother. (John 19:23) This saying from St. John shows us how important our relationships are for the way of love. At the Cross, John and Mary begin the community that will grow into the Church, the Body of Christ. This growth continues as the disciples follow Jesus’ “Great Commission” to go into all the world and make disciples. You and I are here today because we know the importance of relationships. Community makes the way of love a reality.
4. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46) This word from Matthew’s account is a direct quote from the first verse of Psalm 22. Jesus began praying the Psalms during his hours on the Cross. Sometimes this is called “the cry of dereliction.” Jesus questioning God. Prayer connects us to God. Our prayers are often our questions for God. God will show us the answers.

5. “I thirst” or, in the New Revised translation, “I am thirsty” (John 18:28). Before Jesus dies, John shows us his physical and spiritual desires. Jesus wants to say more. His throat is constricted. His lungs are collapsing. His mouth, parched. John often shows us two realities – the physical, the outward and obvious, and the spiritual, the inner and deeper meaning. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus taught, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” (Matthew 5:6) He thirsted, deeply desired for the way of love to triumph. He hoped and prayed and worked for justice, for peace, for healing, for understanding, for community, for love. When we walk the way of love, the way of the Cross, we can ask ourselves, “What do we desire?”
6. The last two words, sayings from the Cross, are almost interchangeable. “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.: (Luke 23:46) As we saw last Sunday from St. Luke, this is Jesus quoting Psalm 31:5. It is his prayer of complete trust, offering, giving his life to God. Our giving, our offerings, our sharing defines our lives, our way of love
7. “It is finished” or, as sometimes translated, “It is accomplished,” is John’s final word from Jesus, before Jesus “gave up his spirit;” before Jesus “handed over” his life to God. Jesus’ work of salvation, the way of love, is completed. The victory over sin, over evil, over fear, over death has been accomplished.

The Cross shows us the way of love. We celebrate it today, on this Good Friday. (Do people ever ask you why we call this day “good,” since Jesus died?) Yet every day we look to the Cross, to the goodness of Jesus’ victory, to the way of love.

We pray that his way may be our way – the way of love – marked by our forgiveness, our hope, our relationships, our desires, our offering and giving, and finishing all God asks us to do. For like Jesus, we pray, “Thy will be done...”

1. George Carey, *I Believe*, 1991, Morhouse, pages 99-100