

04/14/2019

A Prayer to Follow Christ:

Lord, lead us in the way of faith, help us to follow Christ. Open our hearts to receive your love, Open our minds to understand your word. Amen.

About a year ago, the Episcopal Church developed a program called the 'Way of Love'. As a congregation, we have not as yet spent a lot of time looking at this process, although some of you may have looked into this on your own.

It consists of seven principles: Turn; Learn; Pray; Worship; Bless; Go; and Rest.

This morning as we begin Holy Week we will briefly focus on TURN And LEARN.

Maundy Thursday we will focus on Pray and Worship. On Good Friday; Bless; and on Easter Sunday; Go and Rest. These will be but short introductions to this way of life that we will then touch on over the next year.

To Turn means to Pause, listen, and choose to follow Jesus. To Learn involves reflecting on scripture each day, especially on Jesus' life and teachings

Several times during the church year, we renew our Baptismal vows together. We set aside these times, not only to remember our own Baptismal promises that were made on our behalf by our parents and godparents, or by us as adults; but to remind us of our calling to serve God and others right now.

What we do not do often enough is to re-commit to the questions that were asked prior to the Baptismal Covenant. They can be found on Pg. 302 BCP.

The response to the first three questions is: **I renounce them.**

--Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?
I renounce them.

--Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?
I renounce them.

--Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?
I renounce them.

--Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? Response:
I do.

--Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?
I do.

Excellent!

After renouncing Satan, the evil powers of this world, and our sinful desires, we then turn back to Jesus.

Is this a one and done process? No Way. It would certainly be great if it was, but we are all sinners. Every single one of us. We fail *every* day. What's important is that we go through the above process as often as we sin.

MARY BEA SULLIVAN in her book: 'Living the Way of Love', gives a wonderful example of the state that we find ourselves in much of the time. She calls it 'Standing in the Hog Trough'. She says:

"We've all had them, those seminal moments when we can no longer hide from the ways we have hurt God, ourselves, or others. Like the trough, those moments stink; they are uncomfortable, but they are invitations to live anew. Yes, the hog trough is dark and dirty, but it pales in comparison to the exuberant love of the father who sprints toward his smelly son with outstretched arms, pulling him close and covering him in kisses. Jesus tells us the father was ready to forgive before the request was even *made*. Such is the love and grace and forgiveness of God toward us."

The path of sin takes us away from God. With God's help, we turn around and head back. I call this **spiritual aerobics**. Two steps forward, one step back. Sometimes several steps back, over and over again.

Jesus always kept going forward. Despite all of the distractions, Jesus pressed on. Despite the initial temptations by Satan; the constant attacks by the religious leaders; the lack of faith by his closest followers, Jesus focused on his Love for God and his children.

Proverbs 29:18 (KJV) states:

"Without a vision, the people perish, but blessed is he who keeps the law."

Jesus had a vision. We need a vision.

Starting today, we follow Jesus on his path to fulfill his earthly mission. His sacrifice for us coming forth from an immense love for all of God's children.

In Cynthia Bourbeau's reflections, drawn from her book; **The Meaning of Mary Magdalene**: she writes:

“Jesus’s real purpose in this sacrifice was to wager his own life against his core conviction that love is stronger than death, and that the laying down of self which is the essence of this love leads not to death, but to life.” End of quote.

Jesus triumphantly enters Jerusalem knowing full well the end of the story. He fulfils his Mission and Vision.

The Sunday Collect for Proper 28, in the Book of Common Prayer, addresses the importance of Holy Scripture in our lives. We pray: ‘Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen’.

Scripture is not just meant to be read but lived.

As we again begin this final page in the earthly life of Jesus, we turn toward him to follow him on this path. We meditate on the lessons for the week. “By reading and reflecting on Holy Scripture (the Bible), especially the life and teachings of Jesus, we draw near to God, and God’s word dwells in us. When we open our minds and hearts to scripture, we learn to see God’s story and God’s activity in everyday life”. (The Way of Love).

Tomorrow we will read from John 12:1-11 and his version of the anointing of Jesus by Mary.

On Tuesday, we continue with John 12:20-36 and on Wednesday John 13:21-32.

Then we come together on Thursday evening to remember and celebrate Jesus’s sharing of himself in the eternal banquet of the Last Supper. Holy Week is certainly not new to any of us. Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday demonstrate the immense love that God has for each of us. Realizing that we are in the Hog trough is one thing. Knowing where to go once we are out is another. To live into God’s gift of grace and forgiveness may be more than we deserve, but it involves so much love, that we literally need to share that love with others. It is a gift that we cannot keep for ourselves.

Amen!