

The Way of the Cross

One of the questions I get asked quite often is this:

When is God going to fix the mess in our country?

What with a war threatened in Greenland and masked ICE'ers invading our cities and morning headlines that can and do light the hair on fire of the most sanguine among us!

When is God going to fix this?

It's a question that gets asked a lot — not only about our current political crisis — but also by that spouse who's in an abusive relationship.

When is God going to fix this?

It's the lament of a woman married to an active alcoholic.

When is God going to fix this?

All kinds of human difficulties raise that soul piercing question:

When is God going to fix this?

And the answer to that question is in our readings today.

Which is this:

God has already done God's part in fixing everything.

The fix is the fix that Saint Paul tells us about this morning.

The fix is learning how to live our lives — according to —“the way of the cross.”

This is precisely the solution that Paul offers to his newly formed congregation living in Corinth.

This gaggle of people who, like us, come from all sorts of different social and economic backgrounds, from different races and different places.

And as such, they are a community at each other's throats!

For example, unlike Emmanuel Episcopal Church, where, if you show up at a potluck with no food, you will still eat, for the Corinthians, if you don't bring food — you don't eat.

And if I brought prime rib and you brought a bag of stale chips, why — I'll enjoy my mouth watering beef while you munch on your lousy chips!

Kumbaya?

Let's all share together?

Not a chance!

Which of course completely misses the point of everything Paul's been teaching them about the gospel!

Which, as you can imagine, drives Paul completely bonkers!

You can hear him seething beneath the surface as he writes to these nitwits, not once but twice, trying to get them on board with the gospel values of mutual fraternity, kindness, and compassion.

That's why he says elsewhere that there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, but all are one in Christ.

It's why, if Paul were writing today, he'd say there's no longer immigrant or citizen, Latino or haole, cis gender or transgender, but all are one in Christ.

So what is this "way of the cross" that can save us from not only the Corinthian madness of selfishness, and the Washington madness of power and greed, but the infinite varieties of madness that erupt in our own homes?

Well, just like when we talked about baptism a couple of weeks ago, it's helpful to start with what "the way of the cross" is NOT.

It's not about masochistic suffering.

In the old days, some spiritually compliant people would take barbed wire and wrap it around their thighs to help them not think impure thoughts.

But "the way of the cross" isn't that.

Nor is the way of the cross about sadism; so that rather than you suffering pain — you inflict pain on someone else.

Ask just about anyone who went to a Catholic school with the nuns in the 1940s and 50s — they can tell you all about sadism.

My mom was a natural born lefty, but by golly she was beaten with a ruler until she learned to use her right hand!

Definitely not “the way of the cross!”

No, “the way of the cross” is the way of Jesus.

And the way of Jesus is — Meta-noia.

Entering into the larger mind — of God.

That’s where our gospel lesson picks up this morning as Jesus calls his first disciples and begins to wander around the countryside.

Inviting people to — Metanoia!

Come and see — the larger mind of God!

Where does this take us?

First, to the realization that it takes a long time to get there.

If you think the Corinthians were slow learners, just wait til you meet the disciples Jesus chooses!

The arguments!

The pettiness!

The thick-headedness!

In short, the human condition.

So don't expect to Metanoia right out of the box!

It takes all but a very blessed few most of our lives to arrive even at glimpses of Metanoia.

But I assure you, it's worth the effort!

Because when she discloses herself, Metanoia allows us to see all people, including ourselves, as the beloved children of God.

It means finding joy in the exercise of sacrificial love.

Again, not a love that's sadistic or masochistic.

But a love rooted in brutal honesty with self.

So that my own shortcomings are constantly top of mind, not as a guilt trip, but as a reminder — that when I'm in the process of sizing up someone else's shortcomings, to remember Jesus's admonition to remove the log from my eye — before I start questioning you about the speck in your eye.

It's about trusting that we are all the beloved of God.

That anxiety about God's love and care for each of us is wasted energy.

And when I realize that Jesus has done the hard work of saving my okole — then I can share that relief with you.

Because your okole is safe too!

That the benefit of the doubt that God has given to me is the same benefit of the doubt that I can give to you.

I know you folks here have gone through some trying times recently.

I don't know many of the details, and I realize there are all kinds of understandings and takes on what happened and why it happened and so forth.

But what I want you to know is that if you are carrying any kind of hurt or resentment or anger from this period of difficulty, come, sit down and talk with me.

Holding onto those kinds of emotions doesn't do any good.

Like our old friend Archbishop Desmond Tutu used to say, holding onto those emotions is like eating rat poison – and expecting the other person to die.

The way to get through it is to come on in and talk about it.

That's how we can let things go, reducing their power in our lives.

And as we move forward, it's my hope that we will have a growing parish.

And when we do, that growth will inevitably bring new opportunities for conflict.

But rather than having parking lot discussions, when such things come up, bring it up.

Bring it up to the leadership of the church.

To me.

To your senior warden.

I was a drug counselor at Hina Mauka many years ago.

It was a residential facility so all these newly recovering alcoholics and addicts are living with each other, eating together, rubbing elbows with each other 24/7.

And just about every month we'd call for a big circle, where everybody got together and could share their grievances.

It was done for the most part respectfully, in a controlled environment, where people could speak freely — and also honestly listen.

At the end of every big circle the relief was palpable.

Why talk about such a thing today?

Because that is "the way of the cross!"

It's the path to walk if we're to achieve the peace and compassion and mercy that the prophet sings about this morning.

Because this is the life that really is life!

It's God's life!

Imploring even us to become:

The people who once walked in darkness
to now see a great light!

Those who lived in a land of deep darkness--
on them light has shined!

Because God has multiplied the nation,
and increased its joy;

Therefore we rejoice with God
as with joy at the harvest.

Because the Lord is the strength of our life!

By walking "the way of the cross" — we find ourselves at heaven's
gate:

Here and now.

+amen