



THE WAY OF LOVE

Practices for Jesus-Centered Life

things we do as followers of Christ. However, works which flow from our faith – the outward manifestation of how we live our life- do matter and the things we do show our faith. They also reflect our sense of gratitude for all God has done for us.

If what we do – if how we act – is not relevant according to Luther, then why do we have so many instances of Jesus telling us to feed the hungry, visit the sick, care for the widow and orphan and to judge not? As a practical matter, the Letter of James helps us live our life here on earth in ways consistent with the message of Jesus. Love. Help others. Be grateful.

James writes: “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the father of lights.” Every generous act of giving is giving back to God a portion of what God has given to us.

Everything we have comes from God and we are charged to give back to God. Remember Jesus responding to the authorities about taxes? In Matthew 22:21 Jesus says “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”. **What doesn’t belong to God? Nothing.** And yet we often are pretty tight-fisted about money. We think of our salary or other income as “ours” and not God’s. We make decisions about giving based on whether we get a tax deduction or not.

In 2 Corinthians 9:7 we read: “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” We often interpret this verse as

The Way of Love, a call from our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, asks us to examine all aspects of our life and how we are living to show forth Christ’s love for us and for all creation. It’s appropriate that we read from The Letter of James each of the Sundays in September as we consider *The Way of Love*.

You may recall Martin Luther’s role in what led, eventually, to our own Anglican tradition. Among the major premises put forward by Martin Luther was *Sola Fide* – only faith. Our salvation comes from our faith in Jesus as Christ-Jesus as the Savior of the world. Our works, or our acts, do nothing to bring us to salvation according to Martin Luther. That is, we **can’t earn** salvation by what we do. *Sola Gratia*- only grace - is what enables us to know the Lord and to accept Him as our Savior. Again, we can’t earn our salvation through the

only referring to monetary gifts. That's an appropriate reading, and one which I hope you will keep in mind when it is time to make your pledge for 2019.

We can also read this verse as the giving of all our gifts. We sometimes refer to those as giving of time and talent. The Covenant we will read at the end of our service today focuses on these other gifts but make no mistake that your financial gifts are also of critical importance to St. John's if we are going to continue to be the beacon of the light and love of Christ here in Crawfordsville and Montgomery County.

Last week the bulletin insert gave a bit of a description about each of the practices of *The Way of Love*¹ The first is to "Turn":

Pause, listen and choose to follow Jesus

Like the disciples, we are called by Jesus to follow the Way of Love. With God's help, we can turn from the powers of sin, hatred, fear, injustice, and oppression toward the way of truth, love, hope, justice, and freedom. In turning, we reorient our lives to Jesus Christ, falling in love again, again, and again.

Once we have turned toward Jesus then we can "Learn":

Reflect on Scripture each day, especially on Jesus' life and teachings.

By reading and reflecting on Scripture, 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.

There are any number of ways in which you can learn, from daily devotionals, to reading plans, to coming to Bible Study or participating in EFM. Find something that works for you and delve into the Scripture that is the most important part of the three-legged stool that speaks to the Episcopal way of understanding the foundations of our faith.

The third practice is to "Pray":

Dwell intentionally with God daily

Jesus teaches us to come before God with humble hearts, boldly offering our thanksgivings and concerns to God or simply listening for God's voice in our lives and in the world. Whether in thought, word or deed, individually or corporately, when we pray we invite and dwell in God's loving presence.

Daily is the key. And it doesn't have to be formal or a set time although for many of us that can be helpful. Just don't close your eyes if you're driving! Find a way to connect with God through prayer. It will strengthen your relationship. One of the ways I like is something called *The Examen*. It's a way of praying at the end of the day that looks back over the day and gives thanks for the good things that happened and acknowledges where I didn't do as well as I should have. It's important to be honest about both. God forgives.

We come to "Worship" which is important for us individually and corporately.

¹ *The Way of Love*. <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2018/07/23/bulletin-insert-august-26-2018/> (8/25/18)

Gather in community weekly to thank, praise, and dwell with God

When we worship, we gather with others before God. We hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, give thanks, confess, and offer the brokenness of the world to God. As we break bread, our eyes are opened to the presence of Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are made one body, the body of Christ sent forth to live the Way of Love.

Worshipping together is important as it reminds us we are part of the body of Christ. This is not us, alone. This is the community of the faithful, gathered together to support one another. In our corporate worship we can bear one another's burdens; we can hold each other up; our presence is important.

Empowered by worship, we can then "Bless":

Share faith and unselfishly give and serve

Jesus called his disciples to give, forgive, teach, and heal in his name. We are empowered by the Spirit to bless everyone we meet, practicing generosity and compassion and proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ with hopeful words and selfless actions. We can share our stories of blessing and invite others to the Way of Love.

They will know you are Christians by your love. By your words and by your deeds. By what you give to support the ministries of St. John's. Without you we can do less than we can do with you. You are critical to blessing the world with the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the end of each Sunday service we say "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." And you respond: "Thanks be to God." We are to take strength from our time together. We are not, however, to stay here in this building. We are to go out into the world, spreading the Good News of Jesus, the Christ.

Cross boundaries, listen deeply and live like Jesus

As Jesus went to the highways and byways, he sends us beyond our circles and comfort, to witness to the love, justice, and truth of God with our lips and with our lives. We go to listen with humility and to join God in healing a hurting world. We go to become Beloved Community, a people reconciled in love with God and one another.

Our final practice is to "Rest."

Receive the gift of God's grace, peace, and restoration

From the beginning of creation, God has established the sacred pattern of going and returning, labor and rest. Especially today, God invites us to dedicate time for restoration and wholeness – within our bodies, minds, and souls, and within our communities and institutions. By resting we place our trust in God, the primary actor who brings all things to their fullness.

The practice of Rest reminds us also that we are not in this world alone. Rest reminds us that not everything depends on us. It reminds us that we are physical human beings who need rest to function well.

James didn't have the practices of *The Way of Love* when he wrote his letter. But his words offer up a way to live that honors God and it promotes relationships that are healthy and sustaining.

James offers up ways to live that support *The Way of Love*. If practicing all of the steps outlined are too many or too hard to do all at once, pick one. Focus on that until it becomes ingrained in you and in your relationship with Jesus. Then pick a second – and so on until the day comes when you walk in *The Way of Love*. Jesus waits for us. And he will wait as long as it takes. And that's good news indeed.