

Pastor Roy's sermon from September 30, 2018

Last week I spoke of the Scriptures, by the leading of the Spirit, giving birth to our faith. And the Bible as the agreed upon beginning of our conversations about faith, about God, about Love, about justice in our relationships. As we are reminded weekly in the confession, Grace comes first from God to all of us through every means so that we become light houses of grace for those around us. This is not work, this is the gift of our lives. We each have gifts for sharing this grace as individuals, families, and congregations.

As Christians our central focus is on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ--the ultimate sign of how God's grace continues to act and bless. Jesus' willingness to consecrate himself for his own crucifixion is an invitation for us to prayerfully practice. . .the way of the cross. After pain and suffering he entered into joy in God's glory. With his death he did not raise walls of judgment, but in dying he drew ever wider the circles of friendship and mercy as he followed God's call each step of the way.

The early Christians called themselves followers of the Way. The Way of Christ. The way of friendship and compassionate welcome. Grace, Peace, Forgiveness, Love. By nature we usually try to avoid pain and suffering, especially the mental and emotional kind. But those who love, *in fear and trembling*, embrace their own pain and that of others. Love is an oasis of peace. Grief, loss, illness, relationships which are strained, become more bearable in the presence of love, welcome, friendship. Welcoming friendship is why the early church took hold, grew, and could not be crushed or persecuted out of existence. Trouble transformed by love.

Resurrection is our life in God which begins when we give our lives over to the way of the cross. The things we would run from, we come to accept—even embrace with time. As love grows we are more concerned about those we love than about ourselves. This is the message of the cross. This is the way of the cross. The way of healthy, suffering, love.

For example: 1. The way of love allows Moses in today's first reading to resist jealousy and share the prophetic role and wish that all of Israel were passionate prophets of the Spirit.

2. In the Psalm today, it is the way of faithful love that allows us to pray, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer."

3. James reminds us that love invites us to pray while suffering, to sing songs of praise, to pray for the sick, to remind all--of God's forgiveness.

4. Jesus reminds us in today's Gospel that we have ***fellowship with all who share the common cause of proclaiming God's love***. "Whoever is not against us, is for us." And whoever offers a cool cup of water because we are followers of Christ, they will be rewarded. He also reminds us to spare nothing for love's sake. Let nothing get in the way of lifting up, of helping the little ones. There are many little ones among us. In fact, we are ***all*** little ones. God's little children. We must work hard to be at peace with one another. To share the peace. To practice love. In the congregation. In the community. In politics. In care for our neighbor. "Whoever is not against us, is with us."

Finally, faith is a verb—an action. For Christians, faith is actively leaning in the direction of the cross of Jesus Christ. Every aspect of our faith is a gift of the Spirit. We do nothing because of ourselves. The Gospel, good news of Christ, is that we are beloved first, then we are invited to love, to serve, to practice justice and mercy and peace. To feed the hungry, to care for the sick, to provide for the homeless, to share our freedom with those in bondage.

Faith is much more than thoughts and beliefs about God in our heads. Faith is the direct experience of receiving the love of God in every way conceivable so that we can share that love and watch it grow. The Love of Christ pushes us beyond what is comfortable into what is truly faithful. But our souls never depend on what we do. Our souls are welcome in the presence of God for all eternity which most importantly is right now. The presence of God is an eternal now, in this moment. That is the essence of our faith. May we grow in it, may we be beacons of hope and peace and love to all around us, today, right now. Thanks be to God for this grace.