

Journeying together – the Jesus Way!

Loving God, help us to be open our hearts to Your love so that we will bravely love those we encounter along the way. And assist us we pray – that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts are pleasing to You – our Healer, our Liberator, our Redeemer. AMEN.

There are times in our lives when it seems that the vast majority of people are on the same page.

Take the current tariff challenges. The vast majority of Canadians understand that we are living in strange times. Most Canadians understand that trying to make a deal when the target is constantly moving is extremely difficult. Most Canadians understand that a return to ‘free trade’ is best but that isn’t going to happen anytime soon.

When we are aligned with so many others, there is a feeling that we are in the challenging time together – that the best way forward is to remain united . . . to have each other’s backs. Even if there isn’t full agreement on the next steps – it is better to remain united than to try to make side deals.

You see, there is comfort when we are surrounded by so many others. For often it is quite true that there is strength in numbers – when there are others pushing in the same direction, we simply feel stronger . . . we even get more determined as we feed off the energy of each other.

But it doesn’t necessarily take very long for the group to become more like a mob. And when that happens . . . some stop thinking as “mob mentality” takes over creating a ‘thought vacuum’ . . . a space where ‘group think’ explodes.

When individuals just go with the flow without thinking for themselves – it is a very dangerous situation that often leads to some ugly, horrible results. And this can be just as true within the Church as in other places in our world.

We often talk about being part of God's people – the importance of being connected; the importance of community; the importance of the cloud of witnesses who have gone before us.

Yet, the Church has been guilty of 'group think' far too often. Unfortunately, it has been a place where individuals have been indoctrinated concerning what to believe, how to think, and even how to act. And it has resulted in bad things happening – policies and actions that have harmed so many . . . 'Residential Schools'; exclusion of our queer siblings; to name just a couple in my lifetime.

This is why God spends so much time connecting with individuals – even if they are part of a larger group – challenging them to examine what is taking place through the lens of love and when needed to take a stand against what has been deemed the right way.

For, more often than not – God sides with the outsider . . . God walks alongside the foreigner; the oppressed; those who make up the minority opinion.

And this is where it gets uncomfortable for us . . . this is where it gets real. For the space that God wants to create isn't so that the vacuum can be filled with self-serving messages where people protect what they have at any cost. The space that God creates is meant to be a space filled by grace . . . by actions that protect the dignity of all – assisting all to thrive.

As challenging as it is to give intellectual ascent to this God of grace, it is even more challenging – more uncomfortable – to live our lives walking alongside this God. For walking in the footsteps of God . . . can lead to some difficult choices needing to be made.

Why? Because the call of God requires that our talk and our walk use only one filter to determine if we are living as God intends – love. And this filter of love often requires us to act outside of societal norms . . . to act outside of the way that society has deemed the best way to live.

This countercultural way of life – where we are living against the flow; sometimes needing to swim against the current of public opinion – is often seen by those around us as foolish or even stupid. And yet, it is the way we are called to live.

For in many ways, we are no different than the people who made up the Church in Rome that Paul was trying to encourage with his letter to them. The believers in Rome were by no means part of the majority – part of the mainstream of Roman society.

They had chosen another way to live – a way that was countercultural to the Roman way where those conquered became slaves . . . property of the wealthy; where the idea of Roman peace was to slaughter all opposition and plunder all wealth.

The church in Rome – the individuals who made up the community – wanted to live the Jesus Way. Paul explains to the people that the Jesus Way is the way of love. He tells them:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:8-10)

This love of neighbour – can only occur if we have accepted the love God gives to us . . . embracing the truth that we are worthy of love . . . embracing the truth that we are loved fully. Then we are called to love others as we are loved by God.

There is a song by Phil Wickham entitled The Jesus Way that describes for me the way we are to live – I will not try to sing it but listen to these words:

If you curse me, then I will bless you
If you hurt me, I will forgive
And if you hate me, then I will love you
I choose the Jesus way

If you're helpless, I will defend you
And if you're burdened, I'll share the weight
And if you're hopeless, then let me show you
There's hope in the Jesus way

I follow Jesus, I follow Jesus
He wore my sin, I'll gladly wear His name
He is the treasure, He is the answer
Oh, I choose the Jesus way

If you strike me, I will embrace you
And if you chain me, I'll sing His praise
And if you kill me, my home is heaven
For I choose the Jesus way

I follow Jesus, I follow Jesus
He wore my sin, I'll gladly wear His name
He is the treasure, He is the answer
Oh, I choose the Jesus way

And I choose surrender, I choose to love
Oh, God my Savior, You'll always be enough
I choose forgiveness, I choose grace
I choose to worship, no matter what I face

I choose the Jesus way, I choose the Jesus way
I choose the Jesus way, I choose the Jesus way

The Jesus way – the way that God desires us to live; the way that will give us fullness of life . . . is always countercultural to begin with.

For the rhythm of life that God wants for us – often requires some kind of radical change to the way things are currently occurring.

A great example of this is found in today's Old Testament reading.

If you remember last week – we encountered Moses after he had murdered an Egyptian and fled Egypt afraid for his life. But his time away in the wilderness had

allowed God to transform Moses – from an entitled, arrogant man into an individual who was willing to risk it all for God and others.

In today's passage, we find Moses back in Egypt. He was back not to promote himself but to speak on behalf of the enslaved Israelites. And he was attempting to ensure that the Israelites would be protected – not become collateral damage – when God's judgement on the cruelty of the Egyptians occurred.

Now if we allow ourselves – we could become entangled with the exacting details described to create the first Passover. And while it is important to understand that God's plan thinks of everything – I believe we might benefit more from looking at the big picture here.

The backdrop of creating the first Passover – is something of significance for us to try to grasp. The passage begins with these words:

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. (Exodus 12:1-2)

Do you notice the significance of these words? I know missed it more than once as I read and re-read this passage.

God literally changed the calendar for the Israelites. God literally changed the rhythm of their lives by creating a new beginning!

And it is from this new beginning that a new way came into being. And as part of this new way – was the way of community . . . the way of connection. For Passover required neighbours to connect – it required that all people participate and everyone to do so waiting for God to act. For we are told:

This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the Passover of the LORD. (Exodus 12:11)

The people were to be ready to move – to move with God as God acted on their behalf.

And so it is for us.

The first step for us – as a community and as individuals – is to choose the Jesus Way. Not just once but each day – we must be willing to walk out of step with our culture . . . we must be willing to walk in step with love.

Then we must be willing to love – even though we might be mocked; even though we might be harmed.

But remember this – we are not called to live out love on our own! Moses had Aaron as a companion. Paul spoke to all the believers in Rome. And Jesus was all about community.

So important was community to Jesus – that he declares that we need to do everything in our power to maintain it . . . through forgiveness and reconciliation whenever possible.

For there is truly strength in numbers – it is easier to act if you have others to encourage you . . . others to walk into the unknown with . . . others who hold each other up as we stumble trying to live the Jesus way.

Let's not kid ourselves . . . the Jesus Way is not for faint of heart – it is for those willing to love against all odds believing that love wins!

My prayer for this community is that you will journey the Jesus Way together . . . believing that love not only wins . . . believing that love is the only way to live the abundant life promised.

AMEN.