

St Catherine's Church

Lent Quiet Afternoon

The Way of Love

Reflections and Journal

Introducing “Life Transformed: The Way of Love in Lent”

The journey through Lent into Easter is a journey with Jesus. We are baptized into his life, self-giving, and death; then, we rise in hope to life transformed. We are invited to walk with Jesus in his Way of Love and into the experience of transformed life. Together, we will reflect anew on the loving actions of God as recounted in the Easter Vigil readings. Together, we will walk through the depths of salvation history into the fullness of redemption.

Light a candle and read the following verses to settle into this quiet time with God.

Lord, make me know your ways.

Lord, teach me your paths.

Make me walk in your truth, and teach me:

For you are God my saviour.

(psalm 25)

The Way of Love

Lent is traditionally seen as a time of study and growth and perhaps we might take up the invitation to draw closer to God. Here are some ideas or practices we’re going consider:

TURN Pause, listen, and choose to follow Jesus

LEARN Reflect on Scripture each day, especially Jesus’ life and teachings

BLESS Share faith and unselfishly give and serve

WORSHIP Gather in community to thank, praise, and draw near God

GO Cross boundaries, listen deeply, and live like Jesus

Read the statements above and consider which practice you feel God drawing you toward. Which practice do you find most challenging?

Designing a Rule of Life

Are you familiar with the phrase 'A rule of life'? What do you understand by it?

The idea of a Rule of life developed in Christian monastic communities, and indeed, monasteries and convents today still function under a Rule, the best-known of which is that of St Benedict, dating from the 6th century.

A Rule of life is absolutely essential to any monastic life. It says 'this is who we are, this is our story'; and it reminds us of those things God has put on our hearts, calling us back to our foundations.

It is not a set of rules that restrict or deny life but it serves as a framework for freedom: it is a way of living out our vocation alone and together. It is rooted in Scripture, pointing always to Christ; and, in the words of St Benedict, it is 'simply a handbook to make the very radical demands of the gospel a practical reality in daily life.'

Throughout the afternoon, we will start to build our own rule of life based on some of these practices. A rule of life is meant to be simple, realistic, flexible, and achievable. It is a purposeful tool to help us grow into a more meaningful life with God.

Turn

Input

For the ancient Church, the Easter Vigil was the night when catechumens (those who had been studying for months in preparation of their baptisms) would enter into the waters of new birth and emerge members of Christ's body, the Church.

Our current baptismal practices rarely do justice to the drama that those nights would contain. We have evidence that catechumens would be asked to stand on a hair-shirt (a mark of penitence), confess their sins, and renounce Satan and all the forces of wickedness that drew them from the love of God. As they did so, they would turn toward the West – the direction associated with death, since the sun always sets over the western horizon. Then, they would TURN and face the East – the direction of new life and resurrection.

As they watched the sun begin to rise, they would make their profession of faith and walk into the large font. A jar of oil would be poured over their heads, and they would be dressed in a gleaming white garment, before sharing in their first Eucharist.

In our baptism, we have turned from a life of sin and begun to walk the Way of Love back to God.

In our baptism, we have turned from death itself and been joined with Christ in his everlasting life.

And in our baptism, we have turned from living a life alone and have become one with the whole Church as members of the Body of Christ.

Reflection

Settle into the presence of God and imagine God's loving grace upon you. Breathe, and remember that you depend on God for each breath. Ask for the gift of memory and the invitation to be open to the indwelling of God's spirit.

Romans 6:3-11

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Ask God for the gift of imagination and grace. Imagine receiving a letter from the Apostle Paul and listening to his new and exciting words for the first time. Paul tells you that you have died with Christ and are alive to God in Christ Jesus. You review what in your life is keeping you from truly living and notice how those things make you feel.

Record your thoughts here:

Give thanks to God for the gift of life. You remember your own baptism, or a baptism you have witnessed. You hear the water splashing into the font and feel the water dripping on your head or pressing against your body. As your forehead is wiped dry or you emerge from the water, you feel your old self being left behind. You are a new person, raised to new life in Christ, ready to reorient all of who you are to the Way of Love in Jesus. What are you thinking? Feeling? How does remembering this experience change the words that Paul has for you today?

Record your thoughts here:

Building Your Practice of the Way of Love

What is God calling you to change so that you might live more fully? What practice will help you turn away from what keeps you from life?

Learn

Input

Lent has always been the traditional time of study and growth for those who seek to follow Jesus' way and LEARN his life and teachings. As Christians, we are invited to continue to grow in our knowledge and love of God.

In this next passage from the Book of Proverbs wisdom is personified as a woman crying out for people at the crossroads of the city to hear the gift of life she offers. In the Bible, wisdom is an active and powerful force present even at the beginning of the world. She does not want anyone to be left without knowledge of God and refuses to deny God's love to anyone who is willing to learn. However, gaining wisdom is not simply studying a book or memorizing a few facts. Wisdom goes beyond mere knowledge into action. We cannot be considered wise if we do not act in accordance with what we have learned. Wisdom demands integrity. Wisdom calls us to "lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight" (Proverbs 9:6).

Reflection

Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6.

*Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?
On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
'To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.
O simple ones, learn prudence;
acquire intelligence, you who lack it.
Hear, for I will speak noble things,
and from my lips will come what is right;
for my mouth will utter truth;
wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
All the words of my mouth are righteous;
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.
My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,*

*and my yield than choice silver.
I walk in the way of righteousness,
along the paths of justice,
endowing with wealth those who love me,
and filling their treasuries.'*
'You that are simple, turn in here!'
*To those without sense she says,
'Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
Lay aside immaturity, and live,
and walk in the way of insight.'*

Imagine you are walking down a bustling street, in a town or city, and you hear someone call to you saying, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed." You turn your head to listen as words of wisdom spill from her mouth. The noise of the street fades away as you focus on her words. She is inviting you to listen to the life-giving words in Scripture. You bend your ears more closely to hear the words of Scripture she recites for you today. What are those words that resonate for you? What about them is life-giving?

Record your thoughts here:

You remember the wise people whom you have met at the crossroads of life. They could be a partner, friend, child, or colleague. As you give thanks for each of them by name, you settle on one and recall this person's particular words of wisdom. What words of wisdom does this person have for you today? How does what he or she has to say reflect the love of Jesus for you? You sit with this person's words and give thanks.

Record your thoughts here:

Building Your Practice of the Way of Love

What ways of reflecting on Scripture are most life-giving for you? When will (or do) you set aside time to read and reflect on Scripture in your day?

Bless

Input

As noted, a major element in the ancient baptismal rite was turning from sin and renouncing the things that draw us away from the love of God. We are called to renounce the idols we worship in place of God. Now, from our modern viewpoint, we might not think we worship idols; however, idols are not simply images of other gods. Rather, an idol is anything to which we assign ultimate value in our lives – those things we spend our time, talent, and treasure serving other than God. Our job, power, money, reputation, certain relationships, or anything that pulls on our heart more than God – these are idols.

While idols seem momentarily satisfying, they eventually harm our relationship with God and limit our capacity or willingness to live for others. Often, we cling to idols out of an attitude of scarcity; we desire what we think we do not have. When our hearts are focused on an idol, they are bound up and clenched shut like a heart of stone. Only when we turn to God will our hearts be opened so that we can, in turn, open our hearts in blessing to others.

Reflection

Ezekiel 36:24-28.

I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Imagine standing under a waterfall pouring upon your head. The rushing sound of water fills your ears, silencing the noise of the world. This water is refreshing. What images come to mind? You feel a warmth rise up in your heart. The heavy stone that you have been carrying begins to lighten. You feel your heart soften. As you breathe in, you feel a spirit of new life enter your heart. You give thanks for the blessing of the Spirit.

Record your thoughts here:

You remember a time when you have been a blessing to others – a stream of refreshing water that has brought others new life. What needed refreshing? How did you offer God's refreshment and blessing?

Record your thoughts here:

Building Your Practice of the Way of Love

What are the ways that the Spirit is calling you to bless others?

Worship

Input

One of the most dramatic elements of WORSHIP in the Easter Vigil is the element of surprise and delight baked into the liturgy. We start in darkness and subdued energy only to have a burst of worship-filled energy when we get to the ultimate song of worship: the Gloria! When we arrive at the Gloria, we switch on the lights, ring bells, sing at our loudest, and may even have a gleeful sprinkling of holy water as a reminder of our baptism. We are celebrating the greatest surprise of all: the resurrection of Jesus, which put an end to death. This drama is an invitation to let our hearts be moved from fear and despair into gratitude and joy.

In this final oracle from Zephaniah, we hear a distinct call to worship that follows the same dramatic arc that we find in the Easter Vigil. God has come. It is a time for celebrate. We are told to “Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you.... On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion ... he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love.” Here we see that God intends to turn all our fear into rejoicing, which means our worship should well up as an overwhelming act of gratitude.

In Jesus, the prophecy of Zephaniah is fulfilled. From the very moment he was born, the angels cried out to say “fear not” before breaking into their own Gloria song, mirroring ours during the Easter Vigil. In response to this wonderful gift from God, the shepherds ran to his stable to worship the newborn King of Peace. As their fears subsided, their gratitude naturally flowed. Yet, by the time Jesus’ life is ending, when faced with the possibility of following him to the cross, the disciples are once again filled with fear. When they are reunited with the resurrected Jesus, the doors of a new future are flung open and they return to a stance of gratitude and worship. Their fear of eternal death, as well as our own, has been buried in the empty tomb. We are invited to rejoice and let our gratitude for the gift of new life draw us to worship God.

Reflection

Zephaniah 3:12-20.

*For I will leave in the midst of you
a people humble and lowly.
They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord—
the remnant of Israel;
they shall do no wrong
and utter no lies,
nor shall a deceitful tongue
be found in their mouths.
Then they will pasture and lie down,
and no one shall make them afraid.
Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The Lord has taken away the judgments against you,
he has turned away your enemies.
The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.
On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.
The Lord, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,

he will renew you in his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing
as on a day of festival.
I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for it.
I will deal with all your oppressors
at that time.
And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.
At that time I will bring you home,
at the time when I gather you;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the Lord.*

Ask for the gift of experiencing God's faithfulness. Imagine that you are surrounded by voices of praise singing "Gloria!" You experience the joy that comes with knowing that God is in your midst who "will renew you in his love" and "bring you home." What images come to mind as you hear these voices of joy and victory?

Record your thoughts here:

You remember a time in your life when you have been afraid. You may have fears and anxieties right now. Name them. You hear the prophets words, "Do not fear, O Zion. ... The Lord, your God, is in your midst." In the presence of God's love, you feel your fear transform, even if slightly, into confidence that God has promised to bring you home. You are moved to offer words and acts of worship and praise to God.

Record your thoughts here:

Building Your Practice of the Way of Love

What communal worship practices move you to encounter God and knit you into the body of Christ? How will (or do) you commit to worship regularly?

Go

Input

Easter! What an amazing moment it must have been to be one of the women who went down to the tomb that first Easter morning. They came expecting death and

sorrow. Their messiah and friend had been killed, and now the best they could hope for was to give him a proper burial. Instead, they find an empty tomb, two angelic figures proclaiming Jesus' resurrection, and an invitation to new life. Their expectations were blown away. This encounter with Jesus changed them so much that they were compelled to GO back to their fellow followers and proclaim the good news. Their testimony would eventually spread to every corner of the earth so that wherever we go, the love of God will meet us there.

In this journey, you have been called to engage with the mystery of death and resurrection as mirrored in the Easter Vigil. We have been called from darkness into light. From fear into joy. From sin into restoration. From death into life. Our job now is to follow the examples of those women and go into the world proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. Let this be the season that you go and live the full gift of the resurrection.

Reflection

Luke 24:1-12.

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Imagine you have come to the tomb that first Easter morning. Your arms are full of materials to anoint and bury a body. Your mind is full of confusion and doubt. Your heart is full of sorrow. Suddenly, you see two men who have unexplainable and incredible news. Do you dare to believe their words? How will you explain it to others if you do?

Record your thoughts here:

You remember a time when your heart felt transformed in an instant. What were the markers of transformation? How did you feel? That feeling may have moved you to joy and gratitude. You likely told everyone you could in your excitement. Let the good news of the resurrection motivate you in the same way. How would you tell the joyful message of the empty tomb?

Record your thoughts here:

Building Your Practice of the Way of Love

To what new places or communities is the Spirit sending you to witness to the love, justice, and truth of God? How will you build into your life a commitment to cross boundaries, listen carefully, and take part in healing and reconciling what is broken in this world?

MY WAY OF LOVE RULE OF LIFE

Write each of the practices that you decided to commit to during the afternoon below, making revisions that would be life-giving. Post this list somewhere you can see it every day.

Turn:

Learn:

Bless:

Worship:

Go: