

“How Can We Know the Way?”

The scriptures we have today are gifts to us in an externally troubled time. The psalm, the section from the Acts of the Apostles, the epistle from Peter and the portion of the Gospel of John give us so much guidance about how to live our lives as followers of Jesus that if we had only these scriptures to work on and learn from, we would have spiritual food for a long journey.

Thomas, ever the questioner, asks Jesus, “How can we know the way?” Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” In the case of Thomas, Jesus was standing there in front of him. In our case, we find ourselves in a time of sickness, chaos, and fear, and the question “How can we know the way?” renews itself in our own journeys. We may feel, like the Jews at the synagogue in Thessaloniki, that the world is upside down, not because of the teachers who came telling of Jesus Christ, but rather because an illness has thrown our routines, our familiar practices, our relationships, even our patterns of worship upside down.

One thing that has not changed is our connection to Jesus, and through him to others of his followers. St. Paul tells us that we are all the Body of Christ, that we have different purposes in the Body, just as the eyes, the fingers, the legs each have their own appointed ways of serving. The lifelong process of prayerfully renewing our baptismal covenant is one of the sources of that continuation. We seek to become filled with the Holy Spirit. We grow deeper, stronger, and more rooted in our Christian promises, and we turn, time and again, in prayer to the Son as the source of our growth.

Sometimes, we feel nearer to the Son, sometimes further away. The more we seek to open our ears to servants of God, like the deacon, Stephen, the nearer we are to seeing the Son standing at the right hand of God. This is what we affirm in the baptismal covenant on p. 304 of the Book of Common Prayer:

- Our belief in each of God’s three parts: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
- Our choice to continue in learning what the apostles taught us about how to live together as Christians, the sacrament of Holy Eucharist, and in a life of prayer;
- Our continuing vow to resist evil, and to repent (turn away from) any sin we may fall into;
- Our commitment to proclaim the Good news of God in Christ by word and example;
- Our determination to strive for justice, peace and dignity for all people.

The baptismal covenant is a **program** for becoming living stones, foundational to the Christian community in which we participate, and which is laid out in the great creeds of the church very early in our history. In this program, we find a **pattern** for seeking everlasting life in God.

The living out of that program is a **process**, both in our personal lives, and in our lives as members of congregations. It does not happen all at once, just because we have the program conveniently laid out for us on pp. 304-305 of the Book of Common Prayer. Living into our baptismal promises,

made for us by our parents and godparents, and affirm by us in confirmation, is what constitutes our baptismal ministries. EVERY Christian is a baptismal minister.

- Your new life in Jesus Christ is what offers you the opportunity to become a minister,
- And **discoveries** about your God-given talents and abilities enable your ministry,
- And growth in that life is what makes you holy. (Allow me a moment here to say that “holy” does not mean prissy, sentimental, or self-righteous, wanting to share my great insights into what God wants, especially for other people. “Holy” means on the road to completion in God, spiritually healthy, and available to be used for God’s purposes. Holy people are neither prissy nor perfect. They are, however, available to God first.

This time of virus-imposed retreat is a wonderful time to use prayer (the practice of the presence of God) to deepen our covenanted relationship with all three persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God. Jesus teaches us to come before God humbly (we know we have a long way and a lot to learn) and boldly (we know that Jesus has told us that what we ask in his name will be answered). We can share our thanksgivings and our needs with God, we can adore the source of all Love in silence, we can pray for others, and we can listen in quiet for God’s guidance, abiding in his presence. In truth, we can enter God’s presence with anything. It is impossible to shock God, and there is absolutely nothing we can do that will make God stop loving us.

In the week to come, there will be a **prayer** suggestion coming to our facebook group and our email list every day, to help you incorporate intentional prayer into daily life. I realize that some folks already have such a **practice**; regular use of a prayer method (or methods) will strengthen the **process** by which we live out our covenant **program**.

By such regular practice, we will make real for ourselves that we live constantly in the **Presence of God**. If we can incorporate that realization into our daily lives, this time of isolation will have been infinitely worthwhile. We will become living stones in the spiritual home that God is constantly creating. We will learn the Way.

Peace be with us all.

AMEN.