

Gt. Andrew's

WAY OF LOVE

Bible Challenge



50 DAYS OF CONNECTING WITH GOD

Love is a verb.

Day to day, this may be what most clearly differentiates following Jesus from the many other ways we could choose to orient our lives. In our culture, we usually hear about love as a feeling. We look for love; we fall in love; we lose love; we find new love. All that is great, especially for novels and movies.

But Christian love is something more. It's self-giving that empowers all our deepest relationships—with the people closest to us and with God. It guides the choices we make about our calendars, our commitments, and our common life. Every day brings one opportunity after another to build rich connection, the kind that gives life meaning and purpose—the peace the world cannot give (John 14:27).

How do we do love like that? From our Baptismal Covenant, we can find seven actions that take us along the way of love, things we can do day by day to go deeper in connecting with God and the people around us. So, through this Stewardship Season, your clergy are offering 50 days of Scripture and reflections to help us see what God's love in action looks like.

Each week, we'll focus on one of these seven spiritual practices:

- **Rest** – Receive God's grace, peace, and restoration.
- **Go** – Cross boundaries, listen, and live like Jesus.
- **Pray** – Dwell intentionally with God daily.
- **Worship** – Gather to thank, praise, and dwell with God.
- **Learn** – Reflect on Scripture and other sources daily.
- **Bless** – Share faith, and unselfishly give and serve.
- **Turn** – Pause, listen, and choose to follow Jesus.

We invite you to come along for this 50-day journey. Set aside a few minutes daily to learn how God is showering you with love and empowering you to put that love into action.

— Fr. John Spicer, Mtr. Jean Long, Mtr. Rita Kendagor,
Deacon Adam James, and Archdeacon Bruce Bower

The daily Scriptures are taken with permission from the book The Way of Love by Scott Gunn, published by Forward Movement (2020).

Week One:

Rest – Receive God’s grace, peace, and restoration

Oct. 6, 2024 – John 14:22-27

At the Last Supper, Judas (not Iscariot) said to Jesus, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words, and the word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me. I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

To begin our 50-day journey along the Way of Love, we’re focusing on what may be the hardest of the seven spiritual practices from our Baptismal Covenant: rest. In this culture, we aren’t much wired to rest, and some of us especially bear that burden. Too often, at least for me, resting feels like time wasted: “Lord, with the time and space of a day off, I could actually get something done...” But Jesus would say resting is one of the most productive things we can do. Of course, it’s not the only way we hear God’s voice. But setting “our own” time aside for rest (as if time were ours to own) opens space for the Holy Spirit to work, reminding us of Jesus’ model and bringing us peace that productivity cannot give. – *Fr. John*

Oct. 7, 2024 – Psalm 127:1-2

*Unless the Lord builds the house, **
their labor is in vain who build it.

*Unless the Lord watches over the city, **
in vain the watchman keeps his vigil.

What comes to mind when you think of the word “rest”? Do you wish you had more time for it? Do you believe that only the weak need it? How often do we allow ourselves to rest? Taking it a step further, how often do we allow ourselves to rest in God’s grace, peace, and restoration? I find rest to be the most challenging spiritual practice to embrace. However, what I know to be true, to my very core, is that when I practice the spiritual discipline of rest—by receiving God’s grace, peace, and restoration—I am better for it. It allows me to approach the day or week ahead with clarity and peace. How often do you

experience genuine rest and peace? What steps can you take to rest in God's grace and find peace in his presence? – *Mtr. Jean*

Oct. 8, 2024 – Matthew 11:25-30

Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

"Release the shame you feel when resting. It does not belong to you." In her book, *Rest as Resistance: A Manifesto*, Tricia Hersey states over and over that true rest has been taken from us through a system she calls "grind culture." Jesus has welcomed us into his and his Father's world by revealing to us things that are holy. We come to Jesus, tired and broken by our everyday existence, yet we still don't know what it means to give our burdens to the Lord. Jesus is graciously offering us rest for our souls. When I hear this, I hear our Lord offering us peace of mind and gentleness of heart. We cannot earn this, because it's freely offered. And now, I offer you a chance to close your eyes and see Christ's hand waiting to take your hand. My friends, it's time to rest, trust, and believe that you are protected. – *Mtr. Rita*

Oct. 9, 2024 – Psalm 23

*The Lord is my shepherd; **

I shall not be in want.

*He makes me lie down in green pastures **

and leads me beside still waters.

*He revives my soul **

and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.

*Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; **

for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

*You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; **

you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

*Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, **

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Psalm 23 paints a picture of a lifelong journey, not just showcasing a few miraculous moments in life but affirming God’s goodness, provision, guidance, and presence throughout our life’s pilgrimage. The ultimate destination is a feast in God’s presence for eternity. However, this pilgrimage also entails traversing deep and dark valleys. It’s not enough to affirm that “the Lord is my shepherd”; instead, we should confidently and joyfully proclaim that “the Lord is **our** shepherd.” Amidst all the rulers, generals, leaders, and other supposed deities, it is the Lord—I AM THAT I AM, the mighty and compassionate God—to whom we have entrusted our lives. Let us rest in that trust. – *Deacon Adam*

Oct. 10, 2024 – Isaiah 58:13-14

If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah’s message speaks to holding the sabbath as a holy day that must be honored. Is he telling us that we need to make our way to church regularly for worship? Sure. But there’s more to be found in this scripture. Isaiah reminds us that if we allow our personal agendas and self-indulgent behaviors to rule our lives, God’s gifts of grace, mercy, and blessing may prove hard to come by. Spending time worshiping, praying, loving, and serving others must take priority over our lists of “things I’d rather be doing.” We need to spend intentional quality time with God, developing our faith. That’s the small price we’re asked to pay for the wonderful gifts of grace, mercy, and blessing. – *Archdeacon Bruce*

Oct. 11, 2024 – Exodus 20:8-11

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

“You shall not do any work.” This is maybe the clearest of the 10 Commandments and yet the one many of us violate routinely. We think of the sabbath as an antiquated holdover from the days of the blue laws, when certain items were roped off prohibiting their sale on Sundays. But this commandment

for rest isn't about meeting regulations of righteousness. It's about what righteousness really means—right relationship. Sabbath rest is one of God's mandates not because God needs our attention but because we need rest to renew us for right relationship with God, one another, and ourselves. — Fr. John

Oct. 12, 2024 – Hebrews 4:1-11

Therefore, while the promise of entering God's rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For indeed the good news came to us just as to the people of Israel; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "As in my anger I swore, "They shall not enter my rest,"" though his works were finished at the foundation of the world. For in one place, it speaks about the seventh day as follows, "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." And again in this place it says, "They shall not enter my rest." Since therefore it remains open for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he sets a certain day—"today"—saying through David much later, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day. So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.

A gentle reminder for each of us: It's not too late. A sabbath rest still remains for the people of God. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that sabbath because a spiritual practice of rest opens our heart to receive God's grace, peace, and restoration. What do you allow to get in the way of embracing sabbath? How might you engage in that spiritual practice of rest? — Mtr. Jean

Week Two:

Go – Cross boundaries, listen, and live like Jesus.

Oct. 13, 2024 – John 20:19-29

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” A week later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

This story features Thomas, known as “Doubting Thomas” for many centuries. Yet the other disciples, who were present the first time Jesus appeared, had the opportunity to see the holes in his hands and the wounds in his sides. What Thomas was given was an invitation to enter into the Lord’s space. And once he experienced the Lord within the Lord’s space, Thomas was then able to go out in confidence, declaring what he had seen. Many of us have encountered Christ in very personal ways—through the written Word, through spiritual experiences, or through hearing the spoken Word. And yet, perhaps we’ve been hesitant to exclaim that we have indeed been with the Lord. It’s OK to question. It’s OK to doubt. Even in the midst of our inquiries, we’re invited to go out and tell our stories. Yes—even with our stories of doubt, fear, and relentless questions, our Lord compels us to “go.” – *Mtr. Rita*

Oct. 14, 2024 – John 4:7-19

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?”

(Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet.”

Years ago, as a young adult, I discovered a church in Kansas City called Jacob’s Well. The name was meant to invoke a spiritually accepting haven for newcomers to the faith and those of us who were on a spiritual rediscovery mission as we navigated the complexities of adult life. When I read this passage, my mind goes back to my time with Jacob’s Well Church and the imagery of the woman drinking from the well from which she drew her sustenance. We draw sustenance from our spiritual communities and renew ourselves for life’s journey. But—as Jesus says about drinking water from a given well and still remaining thirsty, as opposed to drinking from his water, which will become a spring welling up to eternal life—we’re reminded that it’s not just our relationship with a specific church, but our relationship with Jesus himself that gives us the eternal renewal. How is your relationship with Christ growing? How might you go outside your comfort zone to find him? – *Deacon Adam*

Oct. 15, 2024 – Luke 10:1-11

The Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome

you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: The kingdom of God has come near.'"

For a couple of Sundays last summer, I worshiped with the folks at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Clinton, Missouri. Following the service one day, a parishioner struck up a conversation after I'd mentioned that there are four orders of ministry in the Church: laity, bishops, priests, and deacons. She asked what I thought the real ministry of the laity was, and I responded that "the laity's role is to worship, pray, love, and serve." When Jesus sent the 70 new apostles out, that's what he had in mind for their ministry; and, 2,000 years later, it's still what we are called to do. We've been launched into the world as examples through prayer and service, to show love to others, and to bring God's kingdom near through word and deed. That sounded like a really big job to the 70 apostles, and it does to me, too! But day by day, bit by bit, we each can make an impact. How will you be an example of love and service today? – Archdeacon Bruce

Oct. 16, 2024 – Luke 10:25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, the lawyer asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The lawyer said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

There are reasons the priest and the Levite would have avoided the man who was “half dead.” If the priest and Levite thought he was dead, they would have steered clear from the body to keep from becoming ritually unclean and, thereby, unable to perform their worship duties in the Temple. We hear this story as a call to care for people in need, and so it is. But, in the context of this week’s spiritual practice of going, the story calls us to a first step that’s just as important: going to investigate the experience of our neighbors. The first failure of the Levite and the priest was failing to check whether the man really was dead. Instead, they assumed they understood his experience and responded the way they thought was right. It’s a lesson for us: When we go out and cross boundaries, we learn things we never would have known about our neighbors’ lives and histories. With that awareness, we can meet them much more like Jesus would, taking their lives seriously and letting that guide our acts of love. – Fr. John

Oct. 17, 2024 – Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

This reading from Isaiah was one of the passages I chose for my priestly ordination. I chose it because I can relate to Isaiah and his feeling of unworthiness to speak and serve on behalf of God. Even on the day of my ordination, I still wasn’t sure whether God knew what he was doing with me. And yet, even amid my doubt, I couldn’t say “no” to God. It was with true blind faith that I said “yes.” Perhaps this has been true my entire life—never being quite sure whether I’m worthy to be one of God’s apostles. Have you ever felt that way? So many of us have those feelings of insecurity, self-doubt, and unworthiness. But Christ sees us differently than we see ourselves. We are created in the likeness of God—a God who is pure love. Christ calls each of us, with all our imperfections, to say “yes.” He calls us to go into the world, cross

boundaries, listen to people, and live like Jesus. He calls us to be love in a world that desperately aches for it. Where is God calling you to act, even though you're fearful? What steps do you need to take to help you say "yes"? Where do you see the most need in your community, and how can you go be of help? – *Mtr. Jean*

Oct. 18, 2024 – Matthew 28:5-10

But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

The discovery of Jesus's empty tomb, with an angel declaring his resurrection, prompts us to contemplate the profound importance of Jesus's resurrection as the foundation of Christian faith. It signifies victory over death, the fulfillment of prophecies, and the assurance of eternal life for believers. Consider the amazement and awe the women likely experienced encountering the angel and learning about Jesus's resurrection. Their journey from disbelief to joy to action demonstrates the transformative power of faith and teaches us about the responsibility of bearing witness to such a remarkable event. We, too, are summoned to share the joyful news of Jesus's resurrection and the hope and salvation it offers to all who believe, just as the women were instructed to go and inform the disciples. These women became messengers of the most incredible news the world has ever known, displaying their bravery and conviction. As we reflect on this passage, let us embrace our own responsibility as bearers of the resurrection, spreading the light and love of Christ to everyone around us. – *Deacon Adam*

Oct. 19, 2024 – John 15:12-17

At the Last Supper, Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I

chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

John reminds us that we are to love one another as Christ has already loved us. Consider this: We're able to love only because we've been loved by him. Our capacity to love is the result of being, and having been, loved. We don't love others so that Jesus will then love us; we do it simply because we know what that kind of wonderful love feels like, and we want to share it with others. And, when we say "others," we mean more than just our immediate family and close circle of friends. Jesus urges us to cross boundaries and to engage, listen, befriend, share, and serve. Yes, it's *that* kind of love. How and with whom will you share Christ's love today? – *Archdeacon Bruce*

Week Three:

Pray – Dwell intentionally with God daily

Oct. 20, 2024 – Luke 11:1-13

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.” And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of the friend’s persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. So, I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

The disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray, and he gives them the foundation of the Lord’s Prayer. Jesus teaches that in our prayers we are to honor and praise God, then ask for what we desire or “need.” We are to give thanks and finally ask for forgiveness and petition God to keep us out of harm’s way. It’s just that simple! We are encouraged to be deliberate, focused, and purposeful in our prayer life. Your prayers can be conversational in tone; they needn’t sound like something from the King James Version of the Bible. The key to a meaningful prayer life is to just do it and be intentional about it. Share your worries, hopes, and needs with God, and then say “Amen!” Trust that God will take over from there. You can expect God to answer your prayers with any one of three possible responses. God might say “Yes!” to your prayer. He might say “Not yet!” Or, God’s response just might be “Wait ... I have something even better in mind for you!” – Archdeacon Bruce

Oct. 21, 2024 – Mark 13:14-22

Jesus said, “When you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains;

the one on the housetop must not go down or enter the house to take anything away; the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not be in winter. For in those days there will be suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, no, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut short those days. And if anyone says to you at that time, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'Look! There he is!'—do not believe it. False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.

“Who are you looking for?” Jesus asked Mary Magdalene in the dark outside the empty tomb (John 20:15). Mary had a lot on her mind that morning, so focused on finding Jesus that she couldn't see she was already talking to him. In the crazy days we inhabit, distraction comes differently. We see the climate changing and values shifting and compromise failing, and we wonder whether the signs of the times are signs of the end. The first Christians expected Jesus to return within their generations. Two thousand years later, we're still looking to signs and omens to signal the Messiah's coming. Indeed, he will come again, in God's own time; but we needn't wait for the end of days to find the one we're looking for. He's as close to us as he was to Mary Magdalene. We just need to make the time and space to listen. – *Fr. John*

Oct. 22, 2024 – Psalm 62:5-9

*They bless with their lips, **

but in their hearts they curse.

*For God alone my soul in silence waits; **

truly, my hope is in him.

*He alone is my rock and my salvation, **

my stronghold, so that I shall not be shaken.

*In God is my safety and my honor; **

God is my strong rock and my refuge.

*Put your trust in him always, O people, **

pour out your hearts before him, for God is our refuge.

Verse 5 of Psalm 62 reminds me how easy it is to be dishonest in our relationships with God, others, and ourselves. How often do we bless with our lips while harboring negative intentions in our hearts? This verse serves as a mirror for my life and prompts me to examine where my words and actions are not aligned. When I spend time in prayer, being my authentic self and dwelling intentionally with God, I am a better version of myself. How might you cultivate

authenticity in your relationship with God, others, and yourself? What steps might you take to nurture a deeper level of honesty and openness in your prayers? – Mtr. Jean

Oct. 23, 2024 – 1 Kings 19:1-12

King Ahab told Queen Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." He got up and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place, he came to a cave and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

This story of Elijah is one of my all-time favorite stories in the Bible. Elijah was sought after. Not only was Queen Jezebel seeking to take his life, but God was also seeking Elijah. God didn't show up with a lot of noise and hoopla; God showed up within the sound of sheer silence. Perhaps this is why I seek after the contemplative life. There is something to be learned from allowing God to speak in the silence. Centering prayer, which is a Christian form of silent meditation, does just that. It's a time to allow room in our hearts, minds, and souls for God to dwell. It's not always an exciting time, but it is a rich time. After Elijah heard the sheer silence, he wrapped his face in his mantle out of respect for the presence of God. Mother Theresa describes prayer as "listening to God and the

silence.” We have a tradition of praying with beautiful words. What would it be like if you sat in silence before the living God? – Mtr. Rita

Oct. 24, 2024 – 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. The Lord called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore, Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Young Samuel says, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” We listen because God has something for us to hear. He speaks the truth, and his Word transforms our lives, calling us to repentance. We listen not just for his warnings but for his words of grace. Though Israel wasn’t listening, God still loved them. Samuel would remind them of their purpose, guiding and loving them because they were his chosen people. Hear his promises, forgiveness, and the true story of his Son’s crucifixion and resurrection. This is the most crucial thing you’ll ever hear. The Word calls you to listen, acknowledge your hunger, and be fed by God. Hear his Word of comfort, peace, and hope. It changes you, giving you faith, leading to repentance, and assuring you of God’s forgiveness. This hope is the Word of the Lord. – Deacon Adam

Oct. 25, 2024 – Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she

may not wear me out by continually coming.” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

Jesus and his parables! You never know what he will pull out of his hat, but there’s always a substantive life lesson or moral aspect to the parable. In this one, Jesus effectively implies that we should feel free to “bother” and pester God in prayer anytime, even all the time. He suggests we can never petition God too often or too much. Prayers for others, prayers for ourselves, prayers of thanks ... all can and will be answered through our persistence. In all our experiences of praying, we can learn something about ourselves and grow closer to God. Your prayers may come “prepackaged,” straight out of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Or they may be personal, extemporaneous prayers straight from your heart. Either way, it’s OK to be a “prayer pest”! What or whom do you need to pray for today? – *Archdeacon Bruce*

Oct. 26, 2024 – Jonah 2:1-9

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, “I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; how shall I look again upon your holy temple?’ The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the Pit, O Lord my God. As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the Lord!”

After three days in the belly of the fish, three days in between death and life, Jonah realizes that turning away from God wasn’t his best move. So, Jonah offers this prayer—a reflection on the wonder that, although he’d turned his back on God, God refused to return the disfavor. With the weeds wrapping him up on the ocean floor, Jonah “remembered the Lord”—as it is for so many of us who cry out to the God of last chances. Stunned and relieved, Jonah gives thanks that God has rescued him from death, although some hard conversations with the Lord still await him. But we can learn from his example and instead reach out to God daily ... without having to wait until the seaweed wraps around our heads. – *Fr. John*

Week 4:

Worship – Gather to thank, praise, and dwell with God

Oct. 27, 2024 – Luke 24:28-35

As they came near the village to which they were going, Jesus walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening, and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The story of the disciples’ journey to Emmaus serves as a perfect metaphor for my own spiritual journey. How often do I move through my day without being mindful of Christ by my side? How often do I allow my to-do lists, worries, and concerns to overshadow the peace of God within me? Yet, calmly and patiently, Christ walks with me, waiting for the time when I am ready to see him. This week’s theme, “Worship – thank, praise, and dwell with God,” reminds me that thanking, praising, and dwelling with God isn’t confined to Sunday-morning worship services. Instead, when I seek to thank, praise, and dwell with God every day, it doesn’t take me so long to realize God is with me every step of the way. How often do you miss God’s presence in your life? Are there specific moments when you’ve suddenly become aware of God’s closeness? How might you incorporate worship into your daily routine, using ordinary moments as opportunities to thank and praise God? – *Mtr. Jean*

Oct. 28, 2024 – Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come, the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall

they learn war anymore. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Utopia means an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect. When we look at the state of affairs in our world today, this Scripture sounds like a utopia. Here we read about weapons of war being transformed into agricultural tools. Perhaps today we could think in terms of guns being transformed into schoolbooks and bombs into food baskets. It sounds farfetched, yes. But even in Isaiah's day, the idea of the nations of the world being at peace was a stretch. Even though this prophecy was focusing on peace for Judah and Jerusalem, these words have always been viewed with a lot of hope. Let us continue to pray for a transformative peace to take place in our land and in our world—the kind of peace that worship foreshadows. “Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.” – *Mtr. Rita*

Oct. 29, 2024 – Isaiah 29:13

The Lord said: These people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote.

When I first read this verse, I was a bit smug and judgmental. After all, there are many people who seem only to be giving lip service to God, practicing a watered-down form of Christianity that requires no real commitment. But on a second look, I realized I must look at myself first. I talk a lot about living a life in Christ, and I go through all the motions of being a good Christian. I give, and I regularly attend worship. I pray daily and read my Bible regularly, and I am in several small groups that witness and minister to each other. But how much of that is merely an outward veneer, hiding what lies within? Is my heart really entirely given to the Lord, or am I only giving him a little of who I am? The question I need to answer is this: Is God satisfied with me? Or would he say about me something similar to what he says to the Jewish people through Isaiah? Would he say I honor him only with my lips and not my heart? In the end, what I have done is less important than what I have become. Is my heart in tune with God? Is he the one I worship more than anything else? – *Deacon Adam*

Oct. 30, 2024 – Psalm 96:1-9

*Sing to the Lord a new song; **

sing to the Lord, all the whole earth.

*Sing to the Lord and bless his Name; **

proclaim the good news of his salvation from day to day.

*Declare his glory among the nations *
and his wonders among all peoples.
For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; *
he is more to be feared than all gods.
As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols; *
but it is the Lord who made the heavens.
Oh, the majesty and magnificence of his presence! *
Oh, the power and the splendor of his sanctuary!
Ascribe to the Lord, you families of the peoples; *
ascribe to the Lord honor and power.
Ascribe to the Lord the honor due his Name; *
bring offerings and come into his courts.
Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; *
let the whole earth tremble before him.*

The Book of Psalms expresses ancient worship that survives even today. Those 150 psalms brought encouragement to our ancestors (as they do for us) to praise God for who he is and what he has done. The psalms illuminate the greatness of God, affirm his faithfulness to us in times of trouble, and remind us of the absolute centrality of God's Word. In Psalm 96, we're instructed to give to the Lord the glory due his name. In this context, "give" means to recognize and declare the glory and strength that belong to God in all his being. This powerful theme is repeated all through Psalm 96: God is worthy of praise from the entire earth, from all the families of all the peoples. How do you recognize, worship, and declare God's glory in your life? – *Archdeacon Bruce*

Oct. 31, 2024 – 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

That last sentence has always struck me as odd. Why would we want to "proclaim the Lord's death"? In our culture, people love a winner; so, it seems strange that the sovereign of the universe would want us to keep reminding ourselves and others that he died. But perhaps that's just the point—and a truth that worship helps us remember. Sunday after Sunday, we aren't praising the paragon of success. The culture does a fine job of that on its own. Instead,

worship, especially the Eucharist, helps us remember the deep mystery that “it is in dying that we are born to eternal life,” as St. Francis put it. We worship Jesus not because he’s a winner but because he chose to give up everything to share eternal life with us. So, although resurrection is the essential end of the story, we can’t fail to praise God for the sacrifice that makes it possible. – Fr. John

Nov. 1, 2024 (All Saints’ Day) – Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

This passage from Acts is a glimpse into the early Christian community’s life, showing their devotion to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. It describes a vibrant and generous community, united in worship and service. As I read this passage, I feel that Luke could have been writing about our St. Andrew’s community. Day in and day out, I witness the ways in which parishioners share their joyful, generous, faithful hearts with one another. How blessed am I to be part of a community that inspires me to be a better person! How does your faith and the way you live it affect those around you? Do you feel a sense of unity and common purpose with your faith community? If so, what about St. Andrew’s helps you feel that way? If not, what’s keeping you from feeling it? What actions can you take to help create communities where people value and respect one other despite our differences? – Mtr. Jean

Nov. 2, 2024 – John 4:19-26

A Samaritan woman said to Jesus, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for

salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

How are we to worship God? In a cathedral, a temple, a mosque, a renovated storefront? Do we sing Gospel music, classical hymns, folk songs with acoustic guitars, *a cappella* harmonies with rhythmic dancing? Should we honor our ancestors? Are we to enter into mystical experiences or rely on people who see visions? This Samaritan woman in our reading is pondering questions not totally unlike these. She recognizes that her ancestors worshiped differently from the Jews. Jesus dismisses these differences and tells the woman, “God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth.” Jesus states it so simply, yet we continue to complicate things even to this day as we try to get worship “right.” – *Mtr. Rita*

Week Five:

Learn – Reflect on Scripture and other sources daily

Nov. 3, 2024 – John 14:15-23

At the Last Supper, Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while, the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day, you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

The good Judas asks a very important question: How can this happen, that Jesus will reveal himself to his followers but not to the world? Will he show up clandestine-like and give us a secret message like in *Mission Impossible*? Not really; instead, we must do our part. We show our love for Jesus by keeping his commandments. Then we are in turn loved by the Creator and the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us; and they will come to us and make their home in us. In other words: Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit dwell among us and in us. And we are welcomed to live and love with them. A mystery, yes—but more important, a very sweet promise for those who learn and live God’s ways. — *Mtr. Rita*

Nov. 4, 2024 – Acts 8:26-40

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation, justice was denied him. Who can describe his

generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.” The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

This story is about the Holy Spirit guiding and growing the new church. Philip, led by the Spirit, goes to Gaza, where he meets the Ethiopian eunuch, a person of high status but marginalized by the people of God. Despite being an outsider, the eunuch is faithful, and the Holy Spirit leads Philip to him. This story is a model for the Christian life, showing the importance of courage in following the Spirit and coming alongside people, regardless of differences. Most of all, Philip’s act of compassion is an example of what Christian friendship can be: One believer helping another to hear and understand the Word of God, crossing barriers for the sake of the gospel and for the love of humanity. It doesn’t matter that the person is Ethiopian, a eunuch, rich, or poor; he is still a beloved child of God, and Philip treats him as such. – *Deacon Adam*

Nov. 5, 2024 – Philippians 2:1-8

If, then, there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

In these verses of Paul’s letter to the Philippians, you’re encouraged to understand that if you’ve gotten anything at all out of following Christ—if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care—then do this: Agree and cooperate with each other, love each other, and be deep-spirited friends.

Some days, that can feel like a tall order! But by spending time with Scripture on a regular, intentional, and disciplined basis, we remember our calling to live in this fashion. Seeking out little “truth nuggets” and encouragements in Scripture will help us stay on track in our journey to and through the Kingdom of God. – Archdeacon Bruce

Nov. 6, 2024 – Philippians 4:4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

My parents were both educators. For them, nothing was more valuable than learning, and they passed that value along to their children. For a long time, I thought that meant getting good grades. It became something of an obsession for me, wanting nothing but straight A's. (My need for that kind of affirmation cheated me out of a broader education than I might have had because I avoided subjects in which I might not have excelled.) My parents always insisted they didn't plant that need in me, that I came with that particular brokenness myself. I'm not sure I agreed until they gave me a *Book of Common Prayer* as I was beginning seminary; and their inscription included the citation for today's reading. Learning for the sake of learning is great. But learning that leads you to live in love—that's holy. As you come to the well of Scripture and our tradition, drink in whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy, for it will fill you with God's own peace. – *Fr. John*

Nov. 7, 2024 – Matthew 7:24-29

Jesus said, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and

great was its fall!" Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

This reading reminds me that my spiritual journey requires both study and action. As a lifelong Episcopalian, I've often prioritized living out my faith through actions such as worship, helping others, and building community, rather than studying Scripture. However, reflecting on this week's theme, "Learn: Reflect on Scripture and other sources daily," I see my need for consistent engagement with God's Word. Daily Scripture study opens my mind to see beyond myself and helps me understand my deeper connection with God's creation. It informs me of God's hope and guides me in how to share that hope with the world. Do you take time each day to study Scripture or other sources of spiritual reflection? If not, what steps might help you do so? In your life, where do you see a disconnect between what you believe and how you act? How might you align your actions more closely with your beliefs—and Jesus' teachings? – *Mtr. Jean*

Nov. 8, 2024 – Psalm 1

*Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, *
nor lingered in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seats of the scornful!
Their delight is in the law of the Lord, *
and they meditate on his law day and night.
They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with
leaves that do not wither; *
everything they do shall prosper.
It is not so with the wicked; *
they are like chaff which the wind blows away.
Therefore, the wicked shall not stand upright when judgment comes, *
nor the sinner in the council of the righteous.
For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, *
but the way of the wicked is doomed.*

When I was 10 years old, my childhood denomination held its state Sunday-school convention in Council Grove, Kansas. The state Sunday-school superintendent gave all the children a challenge to learn the first chapter of Psalms and come prepared to recite it the next day. I was determined to do this task well, so I practiced that evening. When my turn came, I stood in front of the modest-sized congregation and recited Psalm 1 flawlessly from the King James Version: "Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly." It turned out, I was the only one who completed the task. And for my

labors, I was awarded a whole dollar! For a 10-year-old, that was a hefty sum. I don't remember what I did with the money, but I do remember Psalm 1 to this day. And, more importantly, I have applied the words of this psalm to my life. The last verse especially has taken root in my heart: "For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (KJV). – *Mtr. Rita*

Nov. 9, 2024 – Micah 4:1-5

In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

Where do you learn from God in addition to Scripture? For me, I experience God in the high peaks and thin air of the mountains. As a child, visiting my dad's extended family and my grandparents in northwest Arkansas was a summer ritual filled with memorable and sentimental experiences in the Boston Mountains. Among many summer swimming and rafting sessions in unique mountain swimming holes, such as Long Pool Falls on Big Piney Creek, and field trips to pick peaches and berries, the lazy days of bike-riding with cousins on small town roads and placing pennies on railroad tracks gave me a glimpse of what the Lord's house in the highest mountains could be like. What does the Lord's house look like for you, and what do you think you'd be learning in that heavenly house? – *Deacon Adam*

Week Six:

Bless – Share faith, and unselfishly give and serve

Nov. 10, 2024 – Matthew 10:1-15

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.”

Jesus chooses the 12 apostles and sends them to the people of Israel. They are to announce the Good News, heal the sick, and raise the dead. The apostles are not to take any money but rely on people’s hospitality in the various towns they visit. If anyone refuses to welcome them, they are to shake the dust from their feet as they leave. Our task as disciples of Jesus is not complicated. First, we are to tell people that the kingdom of God is here. That means people should turn away from their selfish ways of living and honor God’s reign and rule first. If we are to live the life the apostles did, we are to do the same healing, raising, and casting out of evil that the disciples did, relying on the hospitality of strangers along the way. As Jesus taught the original 12, this is not complicated. This is Christian life. We need to take hold of the authority given to us in Christ and exercise it to God’s glory. – *Deacon Adam*

Nov. 11, 2024 – Deuteronomy 8:10-17

You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you. Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding

you today. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.”

Even in the earliest stories of the Old Testament, we hear the warning to be humble and to remember that all the worldly gifts we possess come to us through God. To paraphrase Deuteronomy, the fact that our bellies are full, our flocks have multiplied, and our bank accounts have increased doesn't happen simply because we're so bright or that we've worked so hard. When things are going our way, we can be a bit too quick to take full, personal credit. If you find yourself occasionally trapped in that mindset, be faithful and take a moment to recall what Deuteronomy warns us: “Do not say to yourself, ‘My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.’” God is at work in all our lives. All blessing flows from him ... God merely shares his bounty with us. That is a model for us all. You, too, can be a blessing and share God's love and treasures with others. When and how have you done that? How did it make you feel? – Archdeacon Bruce

Nov. 12, 2024 – Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

This reading gives us my favorite concluding verse for the service of Morning Prayer: “Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine” (BCP 102). I love starting a day with that. For those of us

tempted toward works righteousness (i.e., if I just work harder, God will like me better), this reading reminds us that the blessings we give others—in word and deed, for people nearby or far away—don't come from us in the first place. They come from knowing “the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” and being “filled with all the fullness of God.” So, the most powerful blessings we can offer come when we do our best work—getting ourselves out of God's way. – *Fr. John*

Nov. 13, 2024 – Jeremiah 7:1-7

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah, you that enter these gates to worship the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.” For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.

Jeremiah's words remind me of the two great commandments, love God and love your neighbor. Jesus teaches us over and over to care for one another and to help those in need. As his followers, we're called to bless one another—to share our faith and unselfishly give and serve. How are you blessing those in need? How do you treat those who are marginalized or vulnerable in your community? What actions can you take to promote justice and support those in need? – *Mtr. Jean*

Nov. 14, 2024 – Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this, you

will heap burning coals on their heads.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This appears to be a “do-good” list that Paul has included in his letter to the Romans. And I don’t mean that in a trite way. After going through many theological points in this letter, Paul includes a list that seems to explain to the Roman church how they should live. From loving genuinely, to rejoicing in hope, to practicing patience, to praying, to being good to one’s enemies, Paul seems in essence to say: Just do the right thing. There’s a local restaurant in Brookside that has one major message on the T-shirts worn by the cooks and servers: Be Kind. Just like the message in this part of Romans, those T-shirts remind us to do what we all learned in kindergarten. Treat people right, speak politely, and just be kind. We can climb through many theological hoops, but blessing boils down to treating each other right. – *Mtr. Rita*

Nov. 15, 2024 – Isaiah 56:1-8

Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. Happy is the mortal who does this, the one who holds it fast, who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it, and refrains from doing any evil. Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, “The Lord will surely separate me from his people”; and do not let the eunuch say, “I am just a dry tree.” For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

This chapter begins the seventh and final part of Isaiah’s vision. It relates to the period following the arrival of the first returnees from exile in Babylon. The first eight verses lay out the ideals and expectations for the restored community. God expects those whom he has freed from condemnation and despair to do his will—the focus is on justice. It was injustice that had brought Israel to ruin. God had looked for justice but found only bloodshed and cries of distress. Religion had become separated from social responsibility and rituals from right living. Because of this, God allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed and his people to be

driven out of it. Now, the people are instructed to maintain justice and do what is right, as God's righteousness is about to be revealed. Their life together is to show that the kingdom of God is imminent, breaking in and already making its presence felt. This raises the question we hear in our Baptismal Covenant: How are you striving for justice and peace among God's people? – *Deacon Adam*

Nov. 16, 2024 – Jeremiah 29:11-14

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

In this reading, the prophet Jeremiah was directing his “keep your chin up” exhortation to the Jews in exile. It's also a good message for us, especially when we experience some of life's challenges. Some say that experience is the best teacher. I think experience is the hardest teacher ... because it gives us the test first, and the lesson only comes after the fact. We get thrown into the teeth of a situation, struggle to survive the experience, and then only later come to consider what we've learned from it all. One of Jeremiah's great life lessons is that God uses our experiences to help us to trust him more, for us to lean on him more, and for us to realize that it is he whom we really need in our lives. We can rely on God in order to overcome whatever we're going through. Both bad and good experiences are part of God's work in our lives. God is constantly on guard for our own good, and he reminds us that he has greater plans in store—for us and for those God will bless through us. He allows us to fall down so that we can pick ourselves up and move on with a better outlook on life, using bad experiences as stepping stones. When you go through difficult times, hold onto God's promises. He always is cooking up something good ... just be patient! – *Archdeacon Bruce*

Week Seven:

Turn – Pause, listen, and choose to follow Jesus

Nov. 17, 2024 – Mark 2:13-17

Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him. And as Jesus sat at dinner in Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” When Jesus heard this, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

When you start a journey, it’s good to be honest about who you are and what you can do. I may see myself as a mountain climber, but I’d be smart not to start climbing real mountains tomorrow. Instead, the first step is one your heart takes. That’s what I see Levi doing in this reading. Levi (known as Matthew in other Gospels) is on the outside of every group. The Jews see him as a collaborator with the Romans. The Romans see him as a useful local parasite. He only finds a home with other outsiders. Most likely, Levi is just trying to get by, but he has to know he’s hurting his own people as a profiteer from Rome’s oppressive taxation. So, when Jesus calls, he hears an invitation to start fresh. How about you? What might you turn from so you can toward the Love that’s calling your name? – Fr. John

Nov. 18, 2024 – Psalm 34

*I will bless the Lord at all times; **

his praise shall ever be in my mouth.

*I will glory in the Lord; **

let the humble hear and rejoice.

*Proclaim with me the greatness of the Lord; **

let us exalt his Name together.

*I sought the Lord, and he answered me **

and delivered me out of all my terror.

*Look upon him and be radiant, **

and let not your faces be ashamed.

*I called in my affliction and the Lord heard me **

and saved me from all my troubles.

*The angel of the Lord encompasses those who fear him, **

and he will deliver them.
*Taste and see that the Lord is good; **
happy are they who trust in him!
*Fear the Lord, you that are his saints, **
for those who fear him lack nothing.
*The young lions lack and suffer hunger, **
but those who seek the Lord lack nothing that is good.
*Come, children, and listen to me; **
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
*Who among you loves life **
and desires long life to enjoy prosperity?
*Keep your tongue from evil-speaking **
and your lips from lying words.
*Turn from evil and do good; **
seek peace and pursue it.
*The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, **
and his ears are open to their cry.
*The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, **
to root out the remembrance of them from the earth.
*The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them **
and delivers them from all their troubles.
*The Lord is near to the brokenhearted **
and will save those whose spirits are crushed.
*Many are the troubles of the righteous, **
but the Lord will deliver him out of them all.
*He will keep safe all his bones; **
not one of them shall be broken.
*Evil shall slay the wicked, **
and those who hate the righteous will be punished.
*The Lord ransoms the life of his servants, **
and none will be punished who trust in him.

Psalm 34 is a beautiful hymn of praise and thanksgiving, celebrating God's abundant love and mercy. As I meditate on it, I'm struck by the psalmist's confidence in how his relationship with God provides peace in his life, as well as his eagerness for others to experience that peace. The psalmist urges each of us to turn toward God, to "taste and see" the goodness of God for ourselves, for, in doing so, we too will have the profound blessings that come from knowing God. How have you "tasted and seen" God's goodness and faithfulness—in both joyful and sorrowful times? What daily practices could help you pause, listen, and turn toward Jesus? — *Mtr. Jean*

Nov. 19, 2024 – Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

It seems that Peter had a passive-aggressive moment in this passage. After Jesus told him to go back out to fish some more, Peter, exhausted from a long night of fishing with little to no yield, gave a response that was less than eager. Can't you just see him taking a deep breath, rolling his eyes behind Jesus' back, and then pointing out something Jesus already knew: "We have worked all night long but have caught nothing!" But Peter—whose mother taught him manners, who knew to respect a rabbi—responded perhaps through clenched teeth, "Yet if you say so, I'll let down the nets." If we really get honest, many of us have responded to Jesus through clenched teeth, just as Peter may have done. When in your life have you responded that way, only to have Jesus pour out blessings beyond your imagination? – *Mtr. Rita*

Nov. 20, 2024 – John 1:35-42

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the

Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

The hymn “I have decided to follow Jesus” was written by Sadhu Sundar Singh, a missionary from India. It’s sung to the melody of a traditional Indian folksong. Singh wanted to spread the Gospel in India while respecting his cultural norms, rejecting the idea of conforming to European dress and English melodies. Similarly to the disciples who followed Jesus without changing their cultural identity, Singh sought to bring the Gospel to his people within their cultural context. As we decide to turn and follow Jesus, we might ask ourselves if we’ve made it more complicated than it needs to be. Maybe we need to look to the model of the disciples, and Singh, who didn’t complicate the simple act of following Jesus. – *Deacon Adam*

Nov. 21, 2024 – Luke 5:27-39

Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up, left everything, and followed him. Then Levi gave a great banquet for Jesus in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus answered, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.” Then they said to him, “John’s disciples, like the disciples of the Pharisees, frequently fast and pray, but your disciples eat and drink.” Jesus said to them, “You cannot make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.” He also told them a parable: “No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment; otherwise, the new will be torn, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. New wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, ‘The old is good.’”

Levi, a.k.a. Matthew, was a tax collector. As such, he was charged with collecting heavy duties and tolls from the Jewish people. Tax collectors were despised because most were corrupt and enriched themselves from struggling taxpayers ... and because they worked for the occupying Romans. We get the sense that not only did people hate Matthew, but he also hated himself and the life he was living. Matthew was an outcast, but when Jesus called Matthew to follow him,

he did! Matthew made an immediate decision to turn away from his lucrative profession and become a disciple. Here's the thing about "turning." When we *turn away* from some way of life or some negative aspect of ourselves, we have the great opportunity to *turn toward* something better, fresh, and new. Matthew turned from his own self-hatred and sin, then turned to a new life in Christ. Jesus calls us to leave behind damaged aspects of our lives and to move toward him in repentance, joy, and newness of life. May God give each of us a spirit of joy and redemption as we continue turning toward Christ! – Archdeacon Bruce

Nov. 22, 2024 – Jonah 1:1-6

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so, he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. The captain came and said to him, "What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish."

Jonah is the archetype of one who turns ... in the wrong direction. Before he ends up in the fish's belly for three days, Jonah starts the drama by hightailing it away from God's presence and toward the city of Tarshish in Spain – the edge of the Mediterranean world, as far away from God as he could imagine. Although Jonah finds a ship, he misses the boat by thinking he can flee from Yahweh. Snoozing away in the ship's hold, Jonah awakens to the captain demanding that he join the others by appealing to his god – *the God* – for help. Turning is no easy feat, especially when it's a turn back to God after a turn we've made toward ourselves. Jonah will find himself with three days in his fishy tomb to think about it. – Fr. John

Nov. 23, 2024 – Psalm 51

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; *
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.
Wash me through and through from my wickedness *
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions, *
and my sin is ever before me.*

*Against you only have I sinned *
and done what is evil in your sight.
And so you are justified when you speak *
and upright in your judgment.
Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, *
a sinner from my mother's womb.
For behold, you look for truth deep within me, *
and will make me understand wisdom secretly.
Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; *
wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.
Make me hear of joy and gladness, *
that the body you have broken may rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins *
and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God, *
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence *
and take not your holy Spirit from me.
Give me the joy of your saving help again *
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.
I shall teach your ways to the wicked, *
and sinners shall return to you.
Deliver me from death, O God, *
and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness, O God of my salvation.
Open my lips, O Lord, *
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.
Had you desired it, I would have offered sacrifice, *
but you take no delight in burnt-offerings.
The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; *
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
Be favorable and gracious to Zion, *
and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
Then you will be pleased with the appointed sacrifices, with burnt-offerings and
oblations; *
then shall they offer young bullocks upon your altar.*

During the COVID pandemic, St. Andrew's offered daily prayers on Facebook, a practice we continue today with Pray at 8. I had the privilege of leading Morning Prayer and became intimately acquainted with Psalm 51, the opening psalm for our morning devotions. Praying Psalm 51 gave me the words I needed to engage in an honest conversation about myself with God. This daily practice

of baring my soul brought an inexplicable sense of peace. It allowed me to embrace every part of myself without reservation. I no longer needed to hide the parts of myself I didn't want to face. How often do we avoid confronting our flaws and mistakes, thinking they will magically disappear? There is something powerfully liberating in humbly turning toward God, revealing our true selves, and asking God to "create in me a clean heart ... and renew a right spirit within me." How do you understand God's mercy and compassion in your life? How do you feel about acknowledging your faults? How might you invite God to create a clean heart and renew a right spirit within you? – *Mtr. Jean*

Nov. 24, 2024 – St. Andrew's Sunday

Rest, Go, Pray, Worship, Learn, Bless, Turn (The Way of Love) – Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

I remember watching football games years ago when fans in the end-zone seating would hold up signs reading "John 3:16" during field-goal attempts. For them and for many Christians, that verse captures the "why" of the Incarnation: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have everlasting life." If that's the "why," then I think today's final reading in our 50-day journey captures the "what" of discipleship—the seven spiritual practices of the Way of Love. After the tragedy of Good Friday had turned into Easter's triumph, Jesus told his friends to go back home, to Galilee, and wait for him—a time of watchful **rest** they certainly needed. There, once the disciples saw the risen Christ, their first response was to **worship** him. But even in the light of the resurrection, some of his friends doubted, needing to **turn** back again toward his path. And in his final words to his friends (at least as Matthew tells the story), Jesus gave them this Great Commission: to **go** and **bless** the world by helping those they meet **learn** the Way of Love. And he reminds his friends they won't walk this path alone, implicitly reminding them to **pray** and stay connected with him as he remains with them always. The disciples' story is our story: the story of love in action. – *Fr. John*



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