

The Way, the Truth, the Life

John 14:1-7

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me...
I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”*

When we are discerning and being faithful to what we feel called to do with our lives, claiming and using the gifts God has given us for the enriching of life around us, then we will not only experience the deepest possible joy but also give what the world most needs from us.

This belief has grown stronger in me through the years, and especially since coming here to be in community with you. For me it has to do with what Jesus meant when he said: I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to God except through me. I do not think Jesus meant what some sectors of Christianity say this means, that unless you become a Christian as they define it, your life is not valid or connected to God.

Jesus and “way” go together. Jesus identifies himself with the way of living that flows from and toward God. He calls us to participate with him in that way, within the uniqueness of our own lives and gifts. Let me try to make it a little clearer. One day people were calling Jesus, “Lord, Lord.” He snapped back at them: Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I ask? (Lk. 6:46) Another time Jesus’ family came to a house where he was teaching and knocked on the door wanting to see him. When he was told, he said, Who is my family? He looked around at those listening to him, those who were trying to learn about themselves and God and a meaningful way to live their lives, and he said, Here is my family! Everyone who does the will of God is my family! (Mk. 3:31ff) He did not make himself the center, but God. He called people to the way of trust in God, living as those who know God made the world and loves it and seeks to renew and restore it. Jesus is the **way**, points us to the **way**. He is not the end in himself, but the door to a life full of God and God’s loving purposes. I was reading something this week that said that great spiritual teachers are like doors. The problem is that we get focused on the teacher. We adorn the door itself instead of walking through it. That, I think, is closer to what Jesus in John’s gospel means.

We follow Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life when

- we honor and are attentive to our own lives in relation to God
- we are growing in awareness of our own uniqueness as God made us
- we take time to discern the movement and call of God’s spirit in our lives
- we identify and use the gifts God has given us for the sake of others and the world.

That, I believe, is following Jesus as the way, and the truth, and the life. It has to be real and ongoing. It has to be a matter of our own lives and what we do with them, whether we live them fruitfully or wastefully, whether we cower in fear or take to heart Jesus’ words to his frightened disciples—Do not let your hearts be trouble and anxious; do not let them be afraid. You believe in me; believe in God also. That is Jesus’ way of saying to us, Be who you were made and called to be by God!

Having said that, I want to share with you something that I shared with the Covenant Members at last Sunday night’s meeting. A few months ago I spoke with you about my decision to move toward retirement as minister of the Church of the Covenant at the end of next year. I spoke of my need to be focusing my life more on what I feel most deeply called to be and do. At that time, I asked the Covenant Members to enter with me into a period of discernment together about all of this. Spiritual discernment is giving undivided attention to what God is doing and wants to do in our lives. It calls for our being completely open and receptive. So I encouraged all of us to maintain that openness, including me.

Over the past months I have listened to the Covenant Members and others of you who have shared your thoughts and insights. I have listened to my own heart and life. I have listened to Kaye’s sound, challenging, and loving advice and counsel. In all of that, I have been listening for what God is saying and where God is

leading me at this point. At the end of March, during a week's retreat, I asked myself the fundamental questions we value in our community. What do I most dearly love to do? What is it that gives me deepest joy? What is it that seems to give life to others, that feels like my "niche," my place in the fabric of life? These are all different ways of putting the question: What do I feel God is calling me to do with my life and the gifts God has given me? Through this period of discernment, I came to a different place from where it started. That is nearly always the case when we look honestly, openly, and attentively at our lives. So, last Sunday evening I shared this proposal with the Covenant Members for their consideration:

- That I would begin drawing my Pension Fund payments this coming January, a year earlier than I had previously said. This would free us from some of the financial burden of our administrative/ministerial portion of the budget and free up more of our offerings to be given to our ministries.
- That I would continue as minister of the Church of the Covenant indefinitely, until the time when it seems right for us to seek a new minister. I would have particular responsibilities for worship and worship preparation, including the sermon; pastoral care for our community as needed; meeting with those considering and moving toward Covenant or Community Membership. Otherwise, I would be free to devote time to writing, music, and other work that I feel most called to. I would also be working on the grounds here to keep things looking beautiful and welcoming to retreat center guests and others who come here. I would be free to be away when needing to work on a special writing project, for instance, or to travel with Kaye and help her with her work on behalf of children.
- That we would employ a part time administrative person to work with the day to day, week to week needs of our community. We are a small community with a lot going on, and we need someone to care for these important operational details--communications, scheduling, coordinating the use of the grounds with Camp Kum Ba Yah and Chrysalis Interfaith Retreat Center. There are the many regular tasks like checking mail and messages each day, or calling the plumber when there is a leak! This would be a person who understands and shares the vision and ministry of our community and can interpret this to others. This would give the kind of attention to the important work of administration that we need. It would free me to concentrate on the gifts I believe I have to serve our community in the ways most needed.

The Covenant Members were enthusiastic about this and we will be moving forward in this way. I am very excited about it. I realized while on retreat that my daily and weekly spiritual practice has as its heart my work with the scripture texts for the upcoming Sundays, and preparing for our worship and the sermon. I realized that not having this spiritual routine in my life would be a tremendous loss to me. I also realized that I still feel called to be minister, or spiritual leader, if you will, of our community, but that the administrative demands and needs have begun to drain away my energy, time, and concentration from the things I truly feel called to do. This is different from where I started out, thinking of retiring as minister. That was the beginning of this journey of discernment that has unfolded in this way, a way that has the feel of spiritual consensus.

That is most importantly what I wanted to share with you this morning. And yet, in sharing it, I wanted to express how important it is for each of us to be in touch with our own lives in this way and to support and encourage one another to do so all through our lives. It is about following Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life. It is about devoting time each day, every day to giving attention to our lives in relation to God, others, and the world. It is about the importance of discerning what we have been given to be and do that gives life not only to the world but to us as well. It is about being open at all times, ready and willing to move in the directions in which God's spirit leads us. And it is about the importance of being in a community that is continually mindful of this way of life. Such a community is prayerful, open, willing to be flexible in response to the movements and leading of God's spirit in the lives of persons and the community as a whole.

I am grateful to be part of such a community. And I look forward to all that God will continue to do in and through us to enrich, sustain, and renew the life of God's people and God's creation.