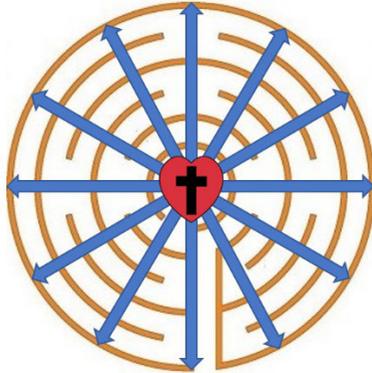


Week 5: March 18 – 24

Gospel Reading: John 12:20-33

Path of Discipleship: In the Footsteps

Week five will represent our journey out of the labyrinth, travelling back through the path after having reached the center.



Day 1 (3/18): *Having explored scripture, your faith, and your purpose in life, you are now ready to go back out into the labyrinth equipped with the knowledge and faith found in the center. You find that the path is the same, but it feels different now; more familiar, less threatening. Some parts of the path are still dark and winding, but now you are armed with the love and light of Jesus Christ and protected by “the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11).*

You know now that you are not wandering aimlessly and without purpose through the twists and turns of the labyrinth. Instead, you know that you are back in the labyrinth with the blessed purpose of spreading that love and light to those who need it; those who have not yet seen that there is a path that leads them out of the darkness and to divine love and salvation, both in the next life and also here on earth.

The Apostle Paul wrote: “For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). Being beneficiaries of that light, it is now incumbent on us to share it with the world.

There are many ways in which you can share your faith with others. Perhaps one of the most effective ways is to set a good example as a follower of Christ. In other words – actions speak louder than words. What are some ways in which you can model your beliefs as a lifestyle that others may want to follow? How are you making or could you make it known that it is your faith that leads you to that type of lifestyle?

What attributes do you think identify a lifestyle driven by faith in Jesus Christ?

In Matthew 25:34-36, Jesus identifies six examples of behaviors that identify “you that are blessed by my Father.” These are:

- feeding the hungry
- giving water to the thirsty
- welcoming strangers
- clothing the naked
- caring for the sick
- visiting those in prison
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Fill in the blank lines at the bottom of the list with some other activities that you think would be appropriate to add to these six, then look at the entire list and identify at least one new way in which you and/or your family can lead a service-oriented life that is founded in the teachings of Jesus.

“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Prayer for Day 1: Lord of life, we thank you for sharing your love and light with us and ask for help in sharing that love and light with others. Guide us and strengthen us as we set out as your disciples and work to make more disciples in your name. Amen.

Day 2 (3/19): *Now, walking bravely back out through the labyrinth, when you encounter people, you understand that they are on a different part of their journey through this labyrinth than you are, and that they may be heading in a different direction than you. You remember the fact that the first time you travelled on a particular part of the path, it looked very different than it does now, and that others may see it in yet a completely different way from their current perspective.*

While physically the same as it was before, the path is very different to you now, in perception as well as context. You realize that you can now use the time that you still have in these twisting, turning, hallways to give others hope and direction in their times of need.

In this week’s Gospel reading, Jesus instructs Andrew and Philip: “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). In addition to foretelling Jesus’ death, how does this metaphor relate to our calling as disciples? What can you do to be a more

fruitful disciple of Christ? What can Calvary do to be a more fruitful congregation?

It is important to remember that every person perceives things differently based on a large number of factors. What are some ways in which you and/or Calvary can learn to be empathetic to others and more understanding that perceptions, understandings, and needs vary greatly even within our own community? Once a greater empathy and understanding is reached, what are some steps that can be taken to fill the needs of others; spiritually, emotionally, and/or physically?

Prayer for Day 2: Dear Lord, you have strengthened us and given us support in many ways throughout the years of our lives. Many times, that work has been done through other people that have shared love with us. In turn, we desire to share love with others, especially those who need it most. Please help us identify ways in which to accomplish this and help us in our desire to be fruitful in this calling. Amen.

Day 3 (3/20): Pope Francis stressed the importance of both prayer and action, stating that, “You pray for the hungry. Then you feed them.” What does this powerful statement mean for disciples of Christ?

How does this affect the way that you view your efforts to spread the love and light of Jesus? How does this affect the way that you view Calvary’s programs?

As always, please approach either of the pastors with any ideas that you have for improving our mission of nurturing disciples and serving the community.

Prayer for Day 3: Provider of life, we praise you for every time that we have had food when hungry and water when thirsty. We

lift up our prayers in thanksgiving for all of the gifts and blessings that you have given us. We desire to praise and thank you not only with our prayers, but also with the way that we live our lives and use the gifts and blessings from you. Please keep us steadfast in that desire and successful in its pursuit. Amen.

Day 4 (3/21): The Path of Discipleship for this week of Lent is “In the Footsteps.” In this week’s Gospel Reading, Jesus says, “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also” (John 12:26). When you consider following in the footsteps of Jesus, what does that mean to you?

In the years following the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the struggles and growth of the early church give us the examples of the apostles and other disciples as they set out to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. What does it mean to you to follow in the footsteps of those men and women?

Consider the differences between these two sets of footprints (Jesus’ and that of the disciples). While Jesus’ example is the one that was set forth specifically for us to follow, it can be helpful to also study and learn from the examples of the early disciples. It is there that we can find examples of how mortal humans tried to follow in the footsteps of Jesus; of overcoming weaknesses, disappointments, and fears through faith in their Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

aWareness Wednesday: Mental health issues sometimes lead to or are worsened by substance abuse issues. The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that almost 8 million adults in the U.S. struggle with both mental health and substance use disorders in any given year. While the co-occurrence of these issues makes recovery more challenging for the person, they can be helped through an integrated treatment plan that addresses both issues. This is best

done through a primary care provider or by calling the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357). Learn more at <https://www.samhsa.gov/disorders>

Prayer for Day 4: Lord Jesus, by coming to us in the form of a human to teach us the ways of your Holy Father, you have laid out a path for us to follow – a path that we can see in a very real way on this earth and in this lifetime. Thank you so much for that sacrifice and gift so that we could have a physical example to emulate and better understand what we need to do to please our Father in Heaven. Please help us to remember the path that you have shown us and to try each and every day to follow in your footsteps. On the times when we falter and stumble in this effort, which we inevitably will, we ask you and thank you for your divine forgiveness and praise you for the sacrifice that you made to pay for the eternal salvation that comes with that forgiveness. Amen.

Day 5 (3/22): As we discussed in Week 4 of this devotional, a labyrinth is not a maze. A labyrinth has only one path, one center, and only one way in and out. Looking at your life through the context of a spiritual labyrinth's path, can you identify times in which you thought that you were moving backwards – away from God, away from a goal – when, in hindsight, you can see that, during that time, what was really happening is that God was guiding you on the one loving path that he had in mind for you the whole time?

In the future, when you encounter setbacks, disappointments, and other turns in the road of life, how can the lessons of the labyrinth help you to put those events in perspective, trust God, and continue faithfully and gratefully on the path which I AM has designed just for you in his fatherly love, graciousness, and mercy?

In advice to the early church in Philippi, the apostle Paul wrote: “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” (Philippians 4:6-7).

Are there worries in your life today that are holding you back from progress, either spiritual or otherwise? As we approach the final week of Lent, consider how you can use your faith to release those worries to the loving peace of God through prayer and trust.

Prayer for Day 5: God of emotional and spiritual freedom, we thank you for your love, comfort, and guidance. Sometimes in this earthly life we are unable to see the purpose behind things that happen and we allow ourselves to get frustrated and disheartened. We apologize for times such as those when we have allowed ourselves to feel pity instead of hope through trust in you. Thank you for your eternal presence and everlasting love. Please help us to always find comfort in this life through the knowledge of your ultimate wisdom. Amen.

Day 6 (3/23): Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, writes that “the cross is laid on every Christian... As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death – we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ.” This ties in with our analogy of returning back into the labyrinth as disciples after having come to faith in the light of Jesus in the center.

Also appropriate to contemplate here are the words of the Holden Prayer, which reads: “God you have called your servants

to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to overcome it. Our faith as disciples of Christ gives us the mechanism by which to achieve that courage. The Bible is full of examples of people who overcame fear and doubt through faith in God. When has your faith been tested? Are you satisfied with the manner in which you handled those situations? Do you think that you would handle them differently now? How so and why?

Prayer for Day 6: Eternal provider of courage and strength, we thank you for always being here for us and providing us with guidance and encouragement through scripture and the examples of your disciples who have gone before us. When we face challenges, Lord, we thank you for those opportunities to strengthen and better ourselves so that we may be of better service to you in the future. Please help us to continuously strengthen our faith in you and use that to better the lives of those around us. Amen.

Day 7 (3/24): *End of the labyrinth journey – returning to the beginning.*

Today we complete the metaphorical journey through our prayer labyrinth by leaving through the exit, which is exactly where we began.

Genesis 3:19 reads: “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” While that passage is most commonly associated with burial ceremonies, it was spoken by

God in the context of First Sin and the expulsion from the garden of Eden. As we consider our return to our beginnings after having travelled to and contemplating the center, how do the context and implications of this verse change when looked at through the knowledge of the fulfillment of God's promises through Jesus Christ?

As we prepare to celebrate Easter, take this time to fully appreciate and praise God for the gift of eternal life and the fulfillment of his promise that "he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth" (Isaiah 25:8).

Prayer for Day 7: God of all generations, we praise you for your unending and all-encompassing love. We thank you for the sacrifice and gift of your son Jesus Christ and dedicate our lives to the goal of serving you and demonstrating our gratitude to you through the way that we live out the remainder of our days on this earth, until the time that you have chosen for us to return to the eternal and boundless love that awaits us in your heavenly kingdom. Amen.