

May 7, 2023  
Pr. Steve

In the earliest days of the Church, before the community took on the name Christians, they called themselves “the People of the Way”. The Way--and this has been true in a variety of other religious traditions as well--you just called it ‘The Way.’

We have this most famous passage today. Jesus says, “*I am the Way, the Truth, the Life*”. But when he first offered that, it was this embracing gift of love to folks who were lost and confused, disappointed, broken down by life. ‘*Where do I turn?*’ ...to the Way--Truth.

But the unfortunate thing is that over the centuries, the Church, and especially Fundamentalism, has taken what was meant to be a gift of love, and turned it upside down.

[ominous voice] ‘*And if you don't believe that Jesus is the Way, you're going to hell!*’

That's hideous! And that's what a whole bunch of people think Christianity is. That's ugly, and we will have nothing to do with that.

Mystics are people who want nothing else than to love. That's it--to love, to love life, to love God, to love Truth, to love Love, to love loving! And especially where people are in pain, and broken-down, exploited, taken advantage of, there Love wants to step in and renew life, because that's all Love knows how to do—to love people into life and loving. We have to learn to go beyond what we know. We have to go beyond our own narrow-mindedness. We have to go beyond the cruelties of this life, so that we are not habituated to Death. That's the great and worst temptation--to become habituated to Death. “*There's nothing you can do about it.*”

‘The Way’ erases the distinction of the internal (this is just about me), and the external. Americans love to privatize God. “*This is just between me and my God. We'll figure it out ourselves! Don't give me that religion stuff.*” Uh-huh, uh-huh. God is Love, the great mutuality and ocean of Love, seeping into every nook and cranny of life. God's an ocean of Light. There is no darkness, there is no shadow--everything to be illumined, everything be changed, and healed, and made whole. There is no separation between the internal--your religious life is not just yours, it's not pure and pristine in the secret place over there somewhere--and then we have the [external] world and that hideous stuff going on in all of its suffering. They're woven together in life and faith.

We need both, we need to nourish that interior wisdom and grace--that connection with the mystery of life and the mystery of who we are. It needs care and attention, so that then we can live out the creativity and compassion to which we've been called in our life, in our society, in our community. We manifest our own creativity and compassion for the well-being of others.

Sometimes that's the ongoing work of transformation. But there's also times of confrontation and the resistance to Death. Jesus lived out both, didn't he? Constantly confronting the powers that be, practicing mercy and compassion indiscriminately. We are confronted and faced by Death in

so many ways these days that we can't take it anymore--the negation of women, eco-violence destroying our own earth, and the slaughter of children. *'Oh well.'*

In Jerusalem, in ancient days before the Jewish people arrived, there was the worship of Moloch, who required the sacrifice of children. We are living in the days of Moloch--and the most powerful people in the land, running government say, *'There's nothing we can do.'* Is that right? Is that right? The worst thing is to become habituated to Death.

We are all mystics. That's not reserved for a special class of people who are, you know, really, really, good people--not like us. They're mystics. No, no, no, no. Mystics are people who carry this longing in their hearts, to love, to love life and others, to love loving and God, to love Truth, everywhere, all the time, everyone.

And I know inside of every one of your heads and hearts, I know this, there is this funny little voice, it just won't let go, that keeps reminding you all the time to desire deep in your heart, the oneness of all life. We go on wanting it, don't we? We really, really do after all the discouraging disappointments in life. That's why we're here this morning--because we saw that trace of believing. It's possible, and it's what we want, and it's Who We Are.

Because the truth is as selfish as I am, I somehow know that I can't be me, and expressing and enjoying me, if you aren't being and expressing and enjoying who you are. *'Gosh I wish I didn't have to live that way. I wish I lived in a country where I could just be isolated, all I did was care about myself.'* Mystics can't live that way. It's unacceptable. And this impulse that keeps dropping in no matter what, which is also (truth to tell) a deep irritation. It's called faith. Faith--it's living into The Way when you don't know how to get there. That's The Way. It's unknown, it's open-ended, it can only be lived into. Because, friends, all the days of our lives are looking between two things, defeat and hope. Every day, every single day--Defeat and Hope.

Like Steven, first martyr, offering a wonderful praise of God's grace-- and condemned to death for it. And while he's being stoned, [he says] *'Mercy, God, on them. They don't know what they're doing!'* That's an example of the Way, into life and into death, into beyond.

How then shall we live? *'We who live in the first world, right? We have more than everybody else and we know it and we're proud'!* Can I get an Amen? Amen! We do that every day, don't we? We who live in the first world, the rich world, which has this incredible capacity to diminish our caring, working to numb and dumb us down every day. *'Just go along with the herd. It's easier that way.'*

How shall we live? Well, I'll offer three intentions to work with. The first is, 'Be Amazed.' Do whatever it takes to be amazed by life, day after day after day. This is utterly critical, because that's what we're deprived of. *We're just here to fix things, right? We're just here to buy things--ultimate consumers. Go along, get along, don't ask tough questions.'* The only thing that breaks through to is be amazed. Nourish what it takes--music, the arts, nature, wisdom, praise--practice

it, incorporate it. We're dead without it. Radical amazement--it's the path forward. 'Let the beauty we love be what we do.'

That's why Chromatica is singing [here today], because they love to sing. It fills their hearts to overflowing—they can't stop. And that's why we need them today, to lift us up, to give us the energy, the joy that there's hope again. That's what the Earthfest was all about—finest compliment, *people were happy*. All afternoon long, people were happy. They were filled with joy--by each other, and new connections, in Hindu dancers and the Aloha Chi Gung, and the gardens. People were just happy! Radical amazement. And this art exhibit [in the Sanctuary], friends, you better absorb it, give yourself a time. Come back during the week, so get in. You don't need to figure it out. It's here to teach us and to open our hearts to be amazed.

Second thing we need--is a willingness to be open to the experience of emptiness. Now, this one hurts, because, as God works with us, emptiness comes along. Things begin to shift and change inside of us. We're not exactly sure where we're going now. Sometimes our priorities change, and we might even lose friends over it. As Simone Weil said, *"First, the grace of God empties us and creates a void--cleaning house. So that, then, gradually, down the pike, then grace begins to fill us with what we really need."*

And the third thing is that we trust building in the life, of feeling that our creativity compassion. We are devoted to the transformation of life, to resistance to Death, loving life as it is and loving love and to what we can become.

By the way, there is no way to peace. (Peace is the way!) The Way, the Truth, the Life. This is not an explanation—it's an invitation, and celebration, of going beyond what we know--into the fullness of love.

Thanks be to God.

May the peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.