

Lent 4: Practicing the Way of Love in the Pattern of Jesus

Baptismal Question

Celebrant: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People: I will, with God's help.

Core Questions

How will we grow as reconcilers, healers, and justice-bearers? How will we actively grow relationship across dividing walls and seek Christ in the other?

The Collect

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. *Amen*

Read the Scripture Together: *John 3:14-21*

Jesus said, "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

Reflection: Love the Light

The way of Jesus involves loving the good, not condemning the bad. The image of lifting up the serpent invites the community to be wounded healers. Rather than condemn the wounded, Jesus comes close to the wounded and sheds the healing light of love on them. How often do we pause in our tendency to condemn and criticize to seek and be the light of love for ourselves and others? We are always learning and practicing the way of Jesus who blesses and teaches us to live his way of love.

In the Labyrinth: Practicing the Way of Love in the Pattern of Jesus

Loving our neighbor takes formation, practice, and commitment. How will each of us learn to be reconcilers, healers, and justice-bearers in Jesus' name? How could we practice sharing stories, growing relationship across dividing walls, and seeking Christ in the "other"?

Make It Real: This Far by Faith Exercise

Gather in circles of no more than 15 people. Review the *Conversation Tips*:

*Speak from your own experience. Be genuinely curious about what others share.
Imagine you can disagree without someone being wrong. Avoid debate and stay with the story.
Seek Christ in others and seek to embody his loving, liberating, life-giving way.*

Now reflect on ways your congregation or ministry engages in loving your neighbors, within and outside the church. Make a list of the most significant ministries (no more than three). For each ...

- Recall the story of how your church took up this ministry. Who had the idea? Why did others say "yes"?
- Describe the process of beginning the ministry. What was hard? What made it work?
- What (and who) did you not know at the beginning that you know now?
- How has God blessed you and your church through these ministries?

Now consider your conversations over the first two weeks. Think about people groups - racial, ethnic, and cultural, but also socioeconomic, ideological, and theological - with whom your church has experienced separation or even tension. With which of these do you wish your church would develop deeper relationship? Once the circle has decided, reflect together:

- How could the ministry experiences you described before help you to approach the challenge of forming these challenging new relationships? How are those experiences a gift you can offer?
- What new learning and practice would help you to prepare for relationship across difference and division? Book study? Dismantling racism training? Story-telling training? Pilgrimage? Prayer? (*For specific information, check www.episcopalchurch.org/reconciliation*)

Closing Prayer

You may give thanks for particular gifts of the Spirit that are now or have been present in your church's life (humility, resilience, generosity, compassion, etc.). You could also ask for God's gracious accompaniment as you venture into spaces of difference and discovery.