

Wednesday, April 1, 2020

Dear Friends,

I miss you! Souci and I miss you!

A prayer: Loving and gracious God, we thank you for life and the many ways you bless our lives. Thank you for Jesus who showed us by example how to walk with you. Guide and direct our steps as we practice the spiritual disciplines of worship and prayer, Bible study and listening, service, giving generously and witnessing. Walk with us as we seek to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.

In the Lenten series begun before the pandemic, the Reverend Adam Hamilton recommended five spiritual disciplines. Each of the disciplines had a corporate or group application and an individual application. The exercise of those five disciplines—together and independently—would deepen our faith and facilitate a closer discipleship with Jesus. The disciplines we enumerated in *The Walk*, a “how-to” for those seeking to walk and work with the Lord.

The five disciplines were worship, study, serve, give and share.

These are foundational to the Christian spiritual life:

1. Worship—including daily prayer;
2. Study—listening for God, including reading scripture;
3. Serving—including acts of justice and kindness;
4. Giving—generosity toward God and others;
5. Sharing—witnessing to our faith through deeds and words. After the author explained the scriptural basis and the meaningful products of those practices, he concluded with a Lenten perspective on those disciplines.

The author believed that the last words of Jesus at the crucifixion were reinforcement for those five disciplines. The seven final words of Jesus reflected the five spiritual disciplines that were commended for his disciples. They demonstrate how Jesus himself exercised the five disciplines in his critical time of persecution and punishment.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1) It is noteworthy that three of the last utterances of Jesus were prayers. In spite of the expression of abandonment and solitude, Jesus still directs the query to his God. He does not doubt the presence of God, but only the lack of intervention. Haven’t we all wondered—sometimes aloud—about the wisdom or concern or inaction of God? When we or loved ones suffer, when misfortune strikes, when loss

occurs, we, too, lament. Many of the Psalms, Job and Lamentations ponder the intention or inattention of God. “Why?” we ask. “Where are you?” In the heavy moments that challenge our faith, we engage in worship, in prayer and communication with God.

The author notes that everything Jesus said and did was shaped by his reading and knowledge of his Bible, the Old Testament. By his words and actions Jesus acted, pointed to, alluded to or fulfilled the

commands, hopes and messages of the Bible. As he was on the cross he prayed Psalm 31:5, “Into your hands I commit my spirit.” (Luke 23:46) This is a statement of absolute trust in God. Jesus entrusts his life and soul to God for safekeeping. In this time of anxiety and worry, we might remember to pray, “Into your hands I commit my spirit.” That can bring inner peace. As we study scripture and discern God’s revelations, we may draw upon what we have learned to shape, guide, direct and comfort us.

Jesus saw his life as a “suffering servant.” “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28) On the cross, Jesus affirms his concern for Mary. He speaks to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to John, “Here is your mother.” Jesus was suffering from the cross, but thinking of his mother. Jesus gave his life away serving others, and that service, that kindness, should be applied to those close to us. The words from the cross remind us that the Lord’s care was not only for the world, but for his mother. That calls us to care for those who are not our parents as though they were.

The suffering on the cross is our example of generosity and self-giving. Jesus modeled what love and sacrifice look like. Jesus said, ‘The Son of Man came to give his life as a ransom for many.’ We, too, are called to give ourselves away in service to God and others. We give to our church—not only from our financial resources, but of our time and talent as well. We have been blessed to be a blessing. The author highlights the words of Jesus, “I thirst” to signify that Jesus had poured himself out for the world. Jesus had given everything he had, the “living water”—for us. He had emptied himself for our sake. Jesus, according to Hamilton, had given everything. The source of living water became thirsty so that we might have life.

Finally, Jesus was to witness, as we are to share. **From the cross Jesus prays, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”** (Luke 23:34) He was interceding for others, offering forgiveness to all those who had mistreated him, misunderstood him, betrayed him, ignored him. That was powerful testimony to his mission to offer mercy and grace and forgiveness to the world. In his death Jesus was demonstrating the extent of God’s redeeming

love. And in his words to the bandit on the cross beside him, he is making one final attempt to reach one who was lost. Jesus saw his plight and was willing to deliver him.

Jesus proclaims, “It is finished.” (John 19:30) It is the translation of a Greek word meaning “completed, fulfilled, or accomplished. Jesus is saying that he had accomplished what God set out to do—to manifest God’s redeeming love. The author of the series declares that “when we survey the wondrous cross,” we find that worship and prayer, study, serving, giving and sharing are expressed in Jesus’ final words from the cross. There he prayed, recited scripture, demonstrated service to others, gave himself for us and sought to draw all people to God. As the hymn implies, the cross of Christ displays a “*love so amazing, so divine,*” *that it demands our soul, our life, our all.* The five practices are means of growing in our love of God and others as we seek to walk with Jesus in our daily lives. ["The Wonderful Cross" Video](#) How can we carry on those five practices as a church—a community of faith—and as individual disciples? I hope and pray that the simple exercises recommended by the author become practices on our journey. It is never too late. In this time of social distancing, we should not remain inert. Take some time to walk—to walk in God’s creation and to walk with God’s son. And when this isolation is over, let us continue “the walk” with Jesus and each other.

- **Pray five times a day and worship weekly.**
- **Read five verses of the Bible daily and study the Bible in a small group.**
- **Practice five acts of intentional kindness a week and serve with others.**
- **Extend five acts of generosity toward others each month, and give generously to God through the church.**
- **Let others know you are a Christian and invite five people to church each year.**

Prayer: Thank you, God, for loving me more than I will ever comprehend. Thank you for sending Jesus to rescue me when I have been lost. I accept your love, your forgiveness, and your grace. Help me as I seek to walk with you. In your holy name. Amen.

Paul’s notes: “Train yourself for a holy life! While physical training has some value, training in holy living is useful for everything. It has promise for this life now and the life to come. (I Timothy 4:7b-8)

Peace, Pastor Kelly, interim