

God will remember our sins no more

As I mentioned a little bit earlier in the service, one of the early names for the Christian Church—for followers of Jesus—was The Way. And, that, of course, tells us quite a lot about the Christian faith—its spiritual ethos, shall we say. It's not Islam, which is "submission". It's not fully described in that word.

The "way" characterized the call of Abraham—or Abram, at that time—who went from the Tigris-Euphrates valley into Palestine, as a wanderer at the call of God. The people of Israel were delivered from bondage in Egypt, and into the Promised Land. The disciples were called by Jesus, "Come, and follow me, and I will make fishers of men [the traditional translation]." So the theme of being on the way and therefore not being stationary is very much part of our Christian faith. In fact, we are quite aware that, if we are too stationary, we tend to "fossilize", we tend to become less than lively. And so, we need to be responsive to that call to be "on the way".

Another aspect of this being "the Way", which is how the Church was characterized at such an early date, is that there is a "narrow way". For example, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount,

Enter through narrow gate, for the gate is wide and road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

The "way" has a narrow quality; it has a singular quality; it's as though there is one-way traffic only along this way.

There are not a multitude of ways. For example, Frost, the American poet, has the image of a road dividing in a forest. And he takes the one way, in the fork in the road; "and it made all the difference", he said. Our lives are like that. We make choices; and the important thing is to make choices which are in accordance with "the way"—God leading us on, through his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

And, in fact, this is also a characteristic of the scriptural witness to "the Way". Jeremiah, when he received the call from God, did not really want to hear that call. However, God said, "I will be with you. Even though kings, and whatever authorities, may give you a difficult time, I will be with you, and you will triumph over them." And we think of Jesus' words, "Take up your cross, and follow me."

So, we are not to be a stationary people. And, if we are a stationary people, we tend to "fossilize" and lose life. On the other hand, we don't follow just any old way. We follow the "narrow way". We make choices in life. But those choices are to be in accordance with "the way", which is the way of Christ, who said, of course, in John's gospel, "I am the way..." And if, for example, we depart from the narrow way, we usually will find out about it, one way or another, either sooner or later.

Now, perhaps, there is only one person who could truly be said to have followed the "narrow way". And that is Jesus himself.

In the passage that I read to you from John's gospel, we hear that various Greeks had come to see Jesus. They approached Philip, which is a Greek name, meaning lover of horses.

They approached Philip, and Philip approached Andrew, and they both came to Jesus. And Jesus saw this as a sign of his impending death—a death which would mean that he would be lifted up and would draw all people to himself. He saw it as a grain of wheat, dropped in the earth, which—the grain—disappears, seemingly—dies, apparently—but new life arises in the plant of wheat.

So Jesus was open to this call of God. He didn't remain "stationary". But, on the other hand, this call was through a very narrow gate indeed. It was through the very crucifixion on the cross at Golgotha. And Jesus, in the passage from John's gospel, said, "Should I say, Father, deliver me, or save me, from this hour? No, it's for this hour that I have come...", to fulfil what was written about me, to fulfil [essentially] my calling." So Jesus followed this narrow path. He was not only not stationary in his response to God, the Father. But he was also obedient, obedient to the narrow path into which God led him.

Well, when we are associated, by faith, in this one, who had "the purity of heart to will the one thing", namely following his heavenly Father—when we are associated by faith with him, we ourselves find that our sins are forgiven. We find that our sins of being unreceptive to the call of God are taken away. We find also that our sins associated with going some different path—a different path to our own destruction, and maybe the destruction of others—that those sins are forgiven, thanks to association by faith with this one who is the Way, and who exemplifies what it means to be on the way.

Now, there is another component of all of this that I would like to mention. And that is—Jesus referred somewhat indirectly to himself, in John's gospel, as an Advocate, because he said, "I will send you another Advocate," namely, the Holy Spirit.

And the wonderful thing about the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit makes this whole manner of life, which is being "on the Way" so present, so real, to us. And so, for example, if we become "set in our ways"—not just "set in our ways"—but if we become stationary rather than following in the "way", which is the way of obedience to God, no matter where he leads, open like Abraham, open like the disciples, called to follow Jesus, and be made fishers of men—when we are not doing that, then, the Spirit is such that—provided we are attuned to God through faith in Christ—that Spirit will make us restless, will make us uncomfortable with situations of just remaining in place. The Spirit will "lead us into all the truth", as John's gospel tells us. So the Spirit is our aid, is our guide, on the way, leading us into "all the truth".

But, if, on the other hand, we are people who go just ever which way—our own choice—not the narrow way, then we find that the Spirit is there, blocking the passage, or otherwise making us realize that that is not the way which we are to go on; and we have, as followers of Christ this narrow way in which we are to follow. So the Spirit, our Advocate, reminds us of Jesus' commands, all that Jesus has taught us—particularly about the "narrow way".

The early Church was called "the Way", and we, still, are the Way. We still are people of the Way. Let us be open to that spiritual reality, which is the Christian Church. It is not merely an institution, stationary. It is on the way. And it is not just any belief, any direction; it is following *the* way, the narrow way, that Jesus has gone before us in.

And so may we, as the Christian Church, be a witness to the world of the Way, of the way we are called into with the dreams and imagination that Spirit enlivens within us; and people on the Way, who are not thrown off course by just any old whim or any passing fad; but we follow

the course that Jesus has taught us, and the Spirit again and again reminds us of what is that Way. So may we as the Church be a witness to the world of the Way, the narrow way, which Jesus himself has lived, and died, and risen again, on our behalf.