Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Love – Week 16

The depths of doing what is healthiest.

Day 106: The Great Sacrifice (part 2): Sharing Bread

After Jesus washed His students' feet, they sat down to eat – and Jesus informed His followers that one of them would betray Him. They asked, 'who?' And Jesus replied, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread after I have dipped it in the dish." Then he dipped the piece of bread in the dish and gave it to Judas Iscariot, Simon's son. Dipping his bread into the dish and then handing it to Judas in an act of deep intimacy, trust, and total friendship – knowing that He was loving His betrayer. This is how Jesus glorified Himself – loving no matter the consequences.

What emotions do you get with the thought of loving "no matter the consequences?" How can you put such love into practice? How can you *receive* such love?

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 107: The Great Sacrifice (part 3): Being Bread

After Judas had received the piece of bread given in love, according to the Anglican Church of Canada's *Book of Alternative Services* (which is an amalgam of biblical sources in this example): While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks he broke it, gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which is given for you." And after taking the cup and giving thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink this, all of you: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which is shed for you and for many, so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of Me." The body the students were used to eating for the Passover feast was the body of a sheep or a goat – food for the symbolic journey from the slavery of Egypt to the promised land of God. And blood? Blood was forbidden to drink! Blood was the very life-essence of the animal.

Jesus was saying: "I'm about to be killed – and I shall be killed in sacrifice, to end the division between humanity and God. My life shall be given into you. I am the new lamb. Just as bread and wine physically get absorbed through your digestive systems into every cell of your body, my very presence, through the Holy Spirit, shall enter into every part of you – and we shall be One. My body is your food for everlasting life. My blood is my very essence, given to you to have life-giving forgiveness. Eat! Drink! Do this repeatedly – whenever you come together, bring Me into you yet again, through the food of Me, and the drink of Me."

There is no greater love than someone gives his life for another. Jesus gave His life for everyone.

Who would you give your life for? Who wouldn't you give your life for? Why would Jesus give His life for you?

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 108: The Great Sacrifice (part 4): Submission

After they had eaten, Jesus and his disciples went outside. Jesus threw himself down with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me! Yet not what I will, but what you will."

He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will must be done."

He went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same thing once more. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is approaching, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us go. Look! My betrayer is approaching!"

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived. Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi," and kissed him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do."

Have you ever had a time when you had to do something because it was the right thing to do, but with all your heart, didn't want to? Jesus's humanity is on full display here. He begs God that there be a different way, presumably a less painful and degrading way – just as you or I might. Jesus accepted that in this case, there was only one way – and He was the one to do it. He loved so much that He set Himself to do it, fully knowing the consequences. He submitted Himself to the will of God.

You will truly be a Christian when you decide to fully imitate Christ in submitting yourself to the will of God.

If you view yourself as a Christian, try to identify areas of your life where you have NOT submitted yourself to the will of God. If you don't view yourself as a Christian, try to imagine what it would be like to do so – would it be restricting? Freeing?

Share your thoughts with others whom you trust.

Day 109: The Great Sacrifice (part 5): Sacrifice

They stripped him and put a scarlet robe around him, and after braiding a crown of thorns, they put it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand, and kneeling down before him, they mocked him: "Hail, king of the Jews!" They spat on him and took the staff and struck him repeatedly on the head. When they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes back on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

They came to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of the Skull"). When they had crucified him, they divided his clothes by throwing dice. Then they sat down and kept guard over him there. Above his head they put the charge against him, which read: "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews."

There may be more painful methods of death than crucifixion. There may be more degrading. There may be more "statement" executions. There may be cheaper! But to combine all four – inflict extreme pain, be totally degrading, and make a strong public statement, and be cheap enough to do on a mass scale – crucifixion excelled, and the Romans were experts at it. Unlike pictures we may see of Jesus on the cross, when a victim was crucified, they were naked. During crucifixion, they would involuntarily empty their bowels. Their private parts would have been on display about eye-height. Humiliation and shame were integral to its purpose. Death was long, often several days. It is one of the most painful deaths devised, involving all the muscles, the lungs, the heart – every part of the body in pain. The effect of crucifixion was to make the statement: "This is a non-person. This is someone to be despised. This is a lump of meat, fit only for the garbage dump. This is an object to which we can do literally anything. This could be you."

The crime for which the person was crucified was posted above their head for all to see. Above Jesus' head was written, "Jesus, King of the Jews."

As we've covered earlier, Jesus' teachings and actions were that He was the Son of God – in fact, He claimed to be One With God. A person named Paul wrote this to people in the Greek city of Philippi after Jesus had left:
"Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well. You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had,
who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men,
and by sharing in human nature. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death —even death on a cross!"

What would it take for you to love someone so deeply that you would go to the depths which Christ did, to open yourself up to public humiliation, shame, and lingering painful death?

How does it feel that Christ went to such depths for you?

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 110: The Great Sacrifice (part 6): The purpose of the Sacrifice

At about three o'clock Jesus shouted with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Then Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and gave up his spirit.

Jesus' crying out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" may have been a cry of despair, of abandonment – but it was also a statement of identity. It is the first line from a part of the bible known as Psalm 22. This psalm describes what it may have felt like to be crucified – all joints dislocated, "can count all my bones." Yet this psalm ends with:

The Lord is king and rules over the nations. All the thriving people of the earth will join the celebration and worship; all those who are descending into the grave will bow before him, including those who cannot preserve their lives. A whole generation will serve him; they will tell the next generation about the Lord. They will come and tell about his saving deeds; they will tell a future generation what he has accomplished.

It was a cry of identity, and a prediction for the future. Jesus sacrificed Himself so this future could happen. He loved His Fatherly God. He wanted all to be united with Him – including you.

During Jesus' physical life on earth, few people were willing to recognize Him as the Son of God, and that is still the case today. Jesus came and taught the ways of God, and served people by encouraging them towards health – healing them physically, socially, spiritually. He loved until He was totally spent. He did this for everyone, including you. What will it take for you to fully embrace Jesus as God and Saviour, committing your whole life, everything in it, to Him who wants what is healthiest for you?

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 111: The Great Sacrifice (part 7): Our Sacrifice joined with His

Following Jesus can be hard. People may make fun of you, people may reject you, people may even kill you in some parts of the world. Every week that we gather together in community to worship, we bring ourselves as sacrifices to join in Jesus' sacrifice. We symbolize this in giving Him our praise and our worship. We symbolize this in giving Him our money. We symbolize this in giving our prayers, where we ask forgiveness where we've not done well, and receive it gratefully – and then extend that same forgiveness to others. We remember where we have been hurt in following Jesus and bring that to Him. We re-commit that we don't belong to ourselves, we don't choose our life and how we lead it, but we belong to God, and we ask Christ to choose how we live. We re-commit to following His Way. We ask Christ to accept our sacrifices and join them with His. We re-accept His sacrifice into us. We renew being one with Him.

That is the meaning of the altar. That is the meaning of the cross. That is the depth of love.

What sacrifices have you made over the past week? Who were they for? Christians find meaning in life through the sacrifices they make – how do you find meaning in your life? What is the meaning of your life? Jesus wants you to be healthy: what will it take for you to live your life in a totally healthy fashion?

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 112: Rest

We come again to the seventh day, so today we rest. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you, whatever your understanding.