

Sermon for Sunday, September 19, 2021 - "On the Way"

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

The disciples did not understand what Jesus was saying but they were afraid to ask. And then they started to argue about who was the greatest. Those may seem like two random, unconnected events. Yet I wonder if there isn't some correlation there. When we feel uncertain, confused, and anxious, it's hard on our egos. It's tempting, then, to try to save face, build ourselves up, and tear others down. It's easy to get a bit argumentative.

This may have happened to me once, or twice, or more when trying to cook with my husband during most of our marriage. I didn't grow up around a lot of cooking. My dad didn't cook. My mom did sometimes, but she tended to view meals as nutritional opportunities. Taste was fairly low on her priority list.

Good food is a huge part of my husband's family, and he loves to make it. His mom's a great cook and he's learned from her. He's also just figured a lot of stuff out by trial and error and exploring. He makes it look effortless. I like to bake but dealing with all the prep, timing, and chopping involved in Larson style cooking felt intimidating. I'm also not great at remembering how to do things in the physical world, but didn't want to ask again. Instead, I'd often get a little feisty and critical to deflect attention for my shortcomings. Or, I'd just check out and go pay bills instead.

Thankfully, Matt is committed to practicing patience and graciousness and mostly succeeds at it with me. And, during the pandemic I decided I wanted to cook more. As I practiced, I gained confidence, experience, and comfort with it all. I can now relax and enjoy time in the kitchen. I can ask Matt questions and sometimes even remember the answer. It took both grace and practice to help me really start cooking with fire.

We need grace and practice in so many areas of our lives, certainly when it comes to following the way of Jesus. His way of love and mercy and justice can seem really appealing. Yet there's also so much about Jesus and his church that is challenging, countercultural and unsettling. It's easy to get feisty and irritated or just check out altogether.

Thankfully, Jesus offers us both grace and practice. Jesus always starts with grace - choosing us even though we are just as clueless as his first disciples, calling us into abundant life with God though we've done nothing to deserve it. And Jesus leads us into a life of practice together. As Jesus' followers we are always on the way. That's a phrase we heard twice in the Gospel today in reference to the disciples - they were on the way. We are too.

In this life, we never arrive at some perfect point, our practice doesn't make perfect. Instead, as Christ's church we journey together on the way. In worship and community life, we learn the practices of faith including those described in our readings today. We practice serving and welcoming people on the margins of society. We practice yielding, making peace, and living with gentleness. We practice asking hard questions, rather than arguing, when we don't understand.

These are difficult things.

We can't do them on our own or just by trying harder.

We need practice. We need community.

We need forgiveness and grace when we fail because we will.

We need help to start again.

We are given all of this in Christ's church as we are together, on the way.

This combination of grace and practice is why the church is a good place to have difficult conversations about racial justice as we will today. We begin with God's grace, grace that frees us to confess our sin rather than trying to deflect it. When we feel anxious and unsettled about racial issues, It's easy to get argumentative and defensive. Or, we worry about making mistakes and so we check out.

Grace allows us to confess that we sin and fall short of the glory of God. It allows us to confess that by what we have done and left undone, we have perpetuated systems of racial injustice and violence. Grace also assures us that God works in and through our broken humanity so that we might be sustained to learn from our mistakes and continue to show up for the work of antiracism.

God's grace and forgiveness makes new life and reconciliation possible. Grounded in this grace, we share in practices of faith.

We practice listening deeply to others whose experiences are different from our own.

We practice being uncomfortable.

We practice asking hard questions and acting with courage.

We practice yielding and letting go of privilege and power.

We practice living in the way of Jesus.

This is an ongoing work. We will never arrive at some point in which we are free from sin and racism. We'll always be on the way, always needing to keep practicing. When we fail, as we will, we turn again to God's grace.

Beloved of God, we have what we need on the way to practice antiracism together.

We have what we need to get cooking with fire.

I'm grateful to be in the kitchen and on the way with you.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.