

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως  
**Pentecost 18-C; 8 September 2019**  
**St. Thomas, Glassboro – Todd Foster**  
(rev. 201909071627)

**Way of Love: Turn**

*In nomine...*

**I. Intro**

This week, as Hurricane Dorian flattened the Bahamas and moved toward Florida, there was one prayer on the lips of every Floridian, then a lot of Georgians and South Carolinians: Turn! After watching what had happened in the Bahamas, they were all hoping to be spared the same trauma. The Hurricane passed directly over some of the islands of the Bahamas and seemed to just squat there for hour after hour, wreaking havoc and destruction even as it set records for the most violent hurricane known in recorded history. When you see something like that barreling at you, all you can hope is for it to turn.

As we begin a new academic year together, with kids going back to school and our Formation offerings for all ages starting up again, one thing I want to bring into this year's preaching is Bishop Curry's rubric called "The Way of Love." The Way of Love is a model for understanding Christian discipleship, an outline for those who might want to develop a rule of life. It is a way of understanding what it means to be a Christian and an invitation to experience the fullness of what God is offering us. You can find an illustration of the Way of Love on page four in your bulletin. It is my hope that this outline will lend some continuity through the year, and provide us with some guidance as we seek to fulfill our purpose as a church, which is to be a school for the soul, a school of discipleship. Church is meant to be a place where we learn how to choose life for ourselves, and to encourage one another to follow through on that choice.

## **II. Turn**

As we begin our series on the Way of Love, the first step in that process is the one called “Turn.” Turning away from certain things and toward others. Like a hurricane turning away from Florida. To put it in purely churchy language, we are invited to turn away from sin and towards God. And honestly, we’re not talking just about those things in our lives that are actually evil. We’re talking about anything that distracts us. Even good things! That’s why we have this crazy Gospel passage today about hating father and mother, brother and sister. I don’t want to water it down too much, but what we have there is a common biblical turn of phrase, hyperbole used to evoke a strong conclusion. Jesus is using a Hebrew idiom that highlights a great preference for one over another. We are invited to turn to Jesus with a passion and a dedication that makes all other commitments and affections pale by comparison.

## **III. Gospel**

What does it mean to prefer following Jesus over your father and mother, sister and brother, spouse, and children? In the time when Jesus spoke those words, family was all you had! There was no social security. Your family WAS your retirement account. Your family was the guarantee that you would eat today, and tomorrow as well. Your family was the reason you weren’t attacked, abused, or enslaved by others. The New Testament talks of caring for widows and orphans because, as bad as life is today for widows and orphans, it was incredibly worse then!

What is it that you depend on in your life? Where does your sense of security come from? What gives you confidence to face the day? Where is your refuge in times of trouble? We still look to our families sometimes, but not as much now as then. We also look to houses, cars, jobs, and bank accounts. We rely on stocked pantries, food delivery, supermarkets. We look to our own strength, our own intelligence, our own healthy bodies. We rely on our smartphones, our televisions, and our computers. We look to status, fashionable clothing, and the esteem of our peers.

And hear what Jesus is saying about all those things. Not that they're bad. Not that we're wrong for enjoying them. But that these are all distractions, these are all things that stop us from receiving God's Kingdom. Because our hands are too full of the things we treasure, we are not able to grasp that which God is holding out, offering to us. As long as we depend on other things for our wellbeing, for our happiness, for our sense of security, we will be unable to depend completely on God for those things. We are invited to figure out how to open our hands, to release them, to make space for God instead.

Here's the point: God fills our lives with good things. Fills them to the brim and overflowing. Those good things we enjoy: they are *from God*. But those good things aren't the point. The love of God is the point. All the good things we enjoy in life: they go away sometimes. They're just not constant or reliable. Even the people we love the most fail us from time to time. That's how it works. And each failure, each loss, each disappointment: it's just a reminder that the goodness we had was a gift from God, and that God's love is constant underneath it all.

So our invitation, in disappointment and in joy, is to constantly turn, turn, turn back towards the love of God.

#### **IV. Invitation: Turn**

Now to turn in a dramatic way can be pretty amazing. It was the campus minister at Virginia Tech who inspired me to turn from a career as computer scientist and go to seminary instead. College is definitely a dramatic time of turning for many people. That's why I hear the voice of God so clearly calling us to be present at Rowan.

And there are other big turning points in every life. Often events like child-birth or a parent's death, marriage or divorce, are opportunities for us to turn, to make some big changes, and to cling to God anew. But the good news is that we don't have to wait for something traumatic to happen. Any of us can choose to "turn" at any time.

How do we do this? Well, just like a novice runner doesn't begin with a marathon, a new weight-trainer doesn't begin with 500lb plates, and a new driver doesn't begin by fighting rush hour down the Schuylkill (I hope) – so we don't "turn" to God in the big things before learning how to turn in the little things.

I begin by choosing to “turn” from my perpetual self-concern, in order to spend time focusing my heart outwards, upon God and my neighbor. I begin by choosing to turn through consistent practices of prayer, worship, and service. I begin by choosing to “turn” from social media and network news to Morning Prayer and the daily lectionary. I begin by choosing to “turn” from a constant need for more to a settled habit of gratitude and acknowledgement of God’s goodness to me. I begin by choosing to “turn” by valuing people not by what they do for me, like a rich man inviting other dignitaries to his banquet, but by practicing seeing the image of God in the other and loving them because of that.

## **V. Conclusion**

In every spiritual journey there is a first step. That first step is to turn. To begin to re-orient ourselves toward God. Turning toward Jesus can be scary and challenging. But like Floridians praying for Hurricane Dorian to turn, so we have God at our sides, whispering encouragement for us to turn, turn, turn, back to God. To let go of everything else and to grasp firmly, and solely, onto God. God is a sure place in the storm, a loving embrace at the end of every difficult day. To choose life, to find God, first: we turn.

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