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Friday, March 25, 2016

Re-imagining "The Way of the Cross"



By The Reverend Canon Matthew Corkern, VGEC Chaplain

John Cassian (360-435 AD) wrote in The Conferences:
To cling always to God and to the things of God –
this must be our major effort,
this must be the road that the heart follows unswervingly.

Our ministries as vergers, sacristans and priests of the Church converge each Sunday and at the great High Feasts to heighten the senses of the witnesses participating, in the walk within the footsteps of our Blessed Lord. With mutual guidance and attendance to the perpetual mysteries and endless cyclical celebrations in The Episcopal Church and across the Anglican Communion, we journey along 'the road that the heart follows unswervingly.' Especially in Holy Week, we seek to invite and accompany others wishing to participate in the Storied Good News highlighted by The Way of the Cross.

About a decade ago, a colleague at the cathedral in Nashville invented a 'Sacred Space for the City' First Friday Series. Amazingly, this series eventually fell with the First Friday on the same date of Good Friday 2006. Undaunted, Canon Anne Stevenson planned a liturgy highlighting 'The Way of the Cross' with stations crafted by artists from the congregation. Since this extraordinary evening, my sense of Holy Week has never been the same. Here at Calvary Church in Summit, New Jersey, where I serve as rector – of course outside of my duties as your chaplain – I worked with our Sacristan-Verger Guild to implement a yearly remembrance of the Stations by which Jesus of Nazareth traveled to the hill of Calvary almost 2000 years ago.

Historically and theologically speaking, Pilgrims to the Holy Land from the earliest times visited the sites where, as far as they could discover, the events of the Gospels had occurred, and there were devotional processions from one to another. So a route was worked out from the supposed site of Pilate's house to Calvary (Golgotha), and pilgrims would make stations or stopping-points to pray and sing hymns at intervals on the way. The present route developed slowly, but returning pilgrims encouraged by 14th/15th century Franciscan friars, marked out incidents experienced by Jesus on the Via Dolorosa [Way of the Cross] as he made his way towards His Crucifixion. Over the centuries, the stations were exported to churches around the world with emphasis on "reliving the Passion events not merely as acts of prayer, but of identification and imagination." And so an

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art-form of plain wooden crosses or painted scenes placed along the nave, or meditation sites in the church garden developed to provide both communal and individual opportunities to walk and identify with Jesus at his most vulnerable point as a human. Consequently, regardless of place and time, "worshippers can walk themselves into Jerusalem, into the central story of Christianity."

This Lent – indeed at the heart of Holy Week – we journey back in remembrance of Good Friday to continue the tradition of witnessing Our Lord's death by walking his path. The Way of the Cross – sometimes called Stations-of-the-Cross – is a simple devotion whose origins can be clearly traced to the Crusades. It consists of a spiritual retracing of the journey of Jesus to the cross and is a reflection of the customs that surround the telling of the same story in Jerusalem. Traditionally, there are fourteen stops (stations); eight based on events directly recorded in the Gospels and six (#3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 13) on related events or pious legends.

1. Jesus is condemned to death
2. Jesus receives the cross
3. Jesus falls for the first time
4. Jesus meets his Mother
5. Simon of Cyrene is made to carry the cross
6. Veronica wipes Jesus' face
7. Jesus falls for the second time
8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
9. Jesus falls for the third time
10. Jesus is stripped
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross
12. Jesus dies on the cross
13. His body is taken down from the cross
14. Jesus' body is laid in the tomb

Retracing my communal thoughts and personal longings that rest in a simple confluence of a First Friday and Good Friday years ago, I invited Canon Stevenson to be at Calvary Church this year as our Anglican-Leader-in-residence for the week leading to Easter Sunday. Parishioners have created their own stations of art. An ensemble of cello, oboe, flute and harpsichord led by a Cantor will create an environment to subtly allow the congregation to transcend for an hour with sacred chants interspersed with holy prayers and readings. Our holy space awaits a few hours to welcome and renew.

As we follow Jesus on His Way to Calvary, we see ourselves mirrored in Him – facing life's dark side with images of life and love to come. I invite you this Holy Week and in the years to come, to ponder anew how The Way of the Cross might yet transform and heighten your congregations' experiences to embrace the path of Jesus and follow unswervingly.

Click the big red button to [register for the 2016 Annual Conference](#) opening on September 22nd and running through noon on the 25th, in Spokane, Washington. The conference is the most popular and anticipated activities of the VGEC every year - please join us!



Abstract: Re-imagining "The Way of the Cross" and how deep reflection on it can transform and heighten our experience in embracing the path of Jesus and how we and our congregations can, therefore, follow it unswervingly. Our VGEC Chaplain, The Reverend Matthew Corkern, Rector at Calvary Church, Summit, N.J. leads us on Christ's path.

Posted by [Ken Holloway](#) at 4:25 PM



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