



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN MAINE
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Sermon by the Rt. Rev. Stephen T. Lane, Ninth Bishop of Maine

The Way of Love

2 Corinthians; Luke 24:30-31a

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

Much of the life of faith is about seeing. We sometimes call it seeing with the heart or seeing with the eye of faith. And this notion about a special kind of seeing is rooted in the tension between the world as it appears and the world as God wants it to be.

Our conviction as Christians is that God is present and active in the world God has made. In fact, the world is sustained, minute by minute, by the presence and mercy of God. God is constantly drawing the world to himself and working with us so that our frail human efforts to do good are transformed into blessings for one another and for all creation.

That is not to say that the world we see with our eyes is false or artificial. It is not an illusion. The things we see, including things on a vast scale, like climate change, are real, but their outward appearance is not the whole story. Within them there is a deeper reality in which God is working for our good. So, even in the midst of climate change, we are able to enjoy a beautiful day or swim in a clean lake or feast on fresh fish. The poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, put it this way - in his poem, *God's Grandeur*.

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

For Christians, the truer things are the deep down things: the presence of God in God's world, the presence of God's Spirit among us, Jesus with us and ahead of us leading us to eternal life. And the deep down things are not only mysteries unseen, but also simple acts so often absent from the world as it is: kindness, compassion, hospitality, justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Indeed, our goal as Christians is to work with God in restoring and renewing the world, in drawing the world to God.

The whole purpose of *The Way of Love* is to train the eyes of our hearts, to train us to see God in the world God has made and in the faces of the people we meet, to help us see the deep down things of life with God.

Do you see your baptism as the most important thing about you? Do you see your own story as a part of the Biblical story? Do you expect to encounter the holy when you go to church? Do you trust that your lives are in God's hands no matter what happens? Do you see others as children of God, people made in God's image and loved by God; people for whom Christ died? Do you think there is something essential about kindness and compassion? Do you understand the pursuit of justice as a responsibility of Christian living? Do you arise from sleep each day conscious of your call to walk in love? Do you let yourself rest and enjoy the gifts God has given you?

It's a lifelong effort, to see with the eyes of our hearts, to daily turn toward Jesus. And it's not something any of us can do alone. Even solitary monks live attached to communities. The life of faith requires mutual support and accountability: to hold us up when we're weak, to keep us moving when our sight fails, to celebrate when we discover the precious gifts of God in our lives.

The world as it is doesn't have much patience with Christian practice. Indeed, the world as it is always trying to co-opt Christians for its own purposes, getting the church to bless behaviors and processes that have nothing to do with love and justice. And the world is very persuasive, convincing us that what the government wants or the political parties want or the corporations want is what God wants. Even when we know that isn't so.

The seven practices of *The Way of Love* are for training our sight, for helping us to see the deep down things, for turning our hearts to the presence of the Holy Spirit, for strengthening us to follow Christ's call.

Several years ago, my wife, Gretchen, and I were sitting in a doctor's office at the Lahey Clinic reeling from the news that she had kidney cancer and needed to have her right kidney removed - right away. And we were trying to process all the facts and all the

data, when the doctor we were seeing, a Jewish man, asked if he might pray with us. We nodded, and he did, for God's presence with us and God's healing. It was so unexpected... and in that moment our eyes were opened and we saw the deep down thing: God with us. And our understanding of what was happening changed.

Two disciples were on the road, fleeing from Jerusalem and the Roman authorities, and they met a stranger who spoke with them about their scriptures and broke bread with them. And their eyes were opened and they saw the deep down thing, and they rushed BACK to Jerusalem and their friends.

As Paul put it, ... since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart... we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed... struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies...

The deep down things are real, my friends. Faith is real. And the hope of the world is found in seeing that truth and living it out, by turning our hearts each day to follow Jesus. May God bless as you train the eyes of your hearts. May God bless you as you walk *The Way of Love*.

Amen.