

DISCIPLE MAKING

How to become more like Jesus and how
To help others do the same.

PART TWO: THE RENEWAL OF THE MIND

*A four week series
starting the week of
January 22*

a small group series

PART II: THE RENEWAL OF THE MIND

A SMALL
GROUP STUDY
~FOR~
WINTER 2023

Introduction

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God...” Romans 12:2

As followers of Jesus, we are to live in such a way that we are being transformed, so that our lives don't just look nice on the outside, but so that we are actually living like Jesus from the inside out. Our lives are meant to show forth the righteousness, justice, and holiness of Jesus in action, and to exhibit the fruit of His life in “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). This is the “abundant life” that Jesus offers those who follow Him.

But how do we experience it?

Last Fall, we engaged in a study of the foundations of Disciple Making, exploring how we are made and how we can experience change from within. This Winter, we will continue with the second installment of Disciple Making: Renewing the Mind.

The life of our mind is incredibly important in the process of transformation. While our minds are not totally free – they literally have a mind of their own! – we do have remarkable freedom to choose how we use our minds to live our lives. This becomes incredibly important because thoughts evoke feelings that motivate our actions, for good or for ill.

The ideas, images, and information that make up the content of our thoughts have great power. Used well, the mind helps us to live as those who dwell upon God in a way that leads to deep, worshipful love of Him. As our minds hold us before God, our hearts are renewed and renovated so that we truly experience and produce the fruit of Jesus' life.

We need to take care that the ideas, like thoughts on such things as freedom, happiness, progress, and the like, are in line with the teaching of Jesus, rather than the systems of this world.

Likewise, we need to be sure that the images that empower our lives reflect right ideas. Images are powerful, emotional icons that motivate our lives. They can be symbols of ideas like freedom, or they can be images of self. If they are healthy,

they will produce life. If they are unhealthy, they can cause great damage in our lives.

So how do we break down false ideas and images? With God's truth! We need to know the truth of who God is and what He requires of us through Scripture. We need to know the teaching of the Church as she reflects upon God's revelation of Himself. This is where we discover the truth that as we "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" God's Word, it changes us by correcting and building those right ideas and images that motivate our lives toward the abundance of Christ.

Week One

Thought and Vision

There is a popular idea that if you can just learn enough, your life will change. We are often taught that if we learn enough Scripture or theology, that everything else will work itself out – we will stop sinning, find peace, and become Christlike people. Sometimes, we actually do experience change as we learn. But just as often, we find that our lives are filled with habits that we know are not good for us, and even though we know we should change, we don't.

The dangerous side of believing that learning alone will change us is that when we don't experience change, we tend to either blame ourselves and try harder or we conclude that our faith isn't actually true after all.

Our minds play a critical role in the transformation of our hearts and lives, but it isn't necessarily as simple as just learning more information. How, then, are our minds involved in the process of transformation into Christlikeness?

The Aspects of Thought

As silly as it sounds, we need to step back and seek to understand the complex world of thought. What are thoughts? Thoughts are all the different ways we are conscious of our lives, including memories, perceptions, and beliefs. Thoughts can look back to the past, to the present, and to the future. Thoughts can create realities.

Dallas Willard, in *The Renovation of the Heart*, suggests that there are four aspects of thought: Ideas, Images, Information, and Thinking Well.

Ideas

Ideas are assumptions and models of reality that form systems of thought in our minds. Freedom, education, happiness, science, progress, and other such concepts are ideas. They are learned from childhood and from our communities, most often unconsciously. Ideas are hard to define, but we intuitively understand what we mean by them.

Our ideas are meant to fall in line with the vision of Jesus' Kingdom as taught in Scripture. This requires making our ideas conscious and measuring them against the teaching of the Bible. That, though, can be a challenging task because our ideas

are often formed unconsciously through the culture of our families and society. We learn values simply from enculturated life. Participating in habitual and ritual activities, everything from going to Church to attending a football game, communicate ideas and values that shape us.

Images

Ideas are often embedded in images, which are concrete or specific pictures that empower ideas, both good and bad. It has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words. Pictures, images, are powerful, and they hold great power to motivate our lives.

James KA Smith suggests that these images are formed by “cultural liturgies.” Cultural liturgies are habits and practices that surround those things that are primary values to us. In a consumer culture, he suggests, the Mall is a cultural liturgy. It is an experience, from the parking lot to the entrance to all the storefronts, that holds out a vision of the good life. Our participation in it forms us. Or consider going to a sporting event or patriotic gathering. These events evoke something in us that moves and motivates us. They form us, whether we like it or not. Smith goes on to advocate for filling our lives with “liturgies” that properly form us into the image of Jesus.

As a side note, Smith, along with many others, suggests that our experience of worship is also a liturgy that is meant to form us in Kingdom life. All liturgies are either formative or de-formative, and they are caught through participation as much as they are taught explicitly. For example, the architecture of the Jewish Temple was a teaching tool that taught the worshiper what was required (forgiveness and cleansing) to come into God’s presence. As one progressed closer to the Holy of Holies, where God’s presence was said to dwell over the Ark of the Covenant, the materials of the complex got more and more precious and costly. Everything in the architecture and ceremony was a multi-sensory teaching tool to help form God’s people into a Kingdom of priests.

Images come to us, then, through what we see, hear, and read. Anything that forms a picture in our mind. That can include the image that we have of ourselves.

Ideas and images are linked together and truly form and motivate our lives. If they are healthy, they shape us for good. If they are untrue or unhealthy, they can deform us.

How, then, can we shape, or re-shape, our ideas and images?

Information

Information supplements, or even supplants, what we understand and believe. Information always has consequences. It works itself out in our lives because it shapes, even corrects, the ideas and images we have in our mind. We need, then, to fill our minds with truthful information. We need to be informed by God and His truth!

This is where knowing Scripture and theology are important. Not everything is true. What we believe matters. Those beliefs, that information, has consequences.

For example, if I believe that God is waiting to punish me and is always disappointed in me, I will live my life in fear, waiting to receive what I have coming to me. If, however, I believe that God loves me and promises to forgive me when I admit I have done wrong, I will live with much greater peace, freedom, and gratitude.

Thinking Well

Many people have come to believe that thinking and reason are somehow opposed to faith. That's bad information! God created us with the ability to think and reason, and expects us to use it to seek to know and follow Him. Thinking well is how we take information and derive proper consequences from it.

Consider, for example, the Apostle Paul as he thinks through the consequence of the gift of Jesus:

If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32)

We must apply our thinking *to* God's Word and *with the help of* God's Word, using our reason to understand the facts and information of the Bible. As the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent reasons and prays:

Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and the comfort of your holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

It is as God's Word becomes a part of who we are that we will find peace, hope, and abundant life.

Vision, Intention, and Means

We return now to a foundational belief that a relationship with God is inherently transformative. As we stand before God, dwelling on and in Him, we will grow in our love for and worship of Him, which in turn transforms us. How, though, does that work?

Dallas Willard suggests that intentional change is the product of Vision, Intention, and Means.

Vision

Vision is our greatest need. It forms those images and ideas that shape proper intentions and useful means. We need a right Vision of God and our life with Him. The more we know God for who He is as revealed in Scripture, the more we will fall in love with Him. The more we catch God's Vision for our abundant life with Him, the more we will want to pursue it in our lives.

Notice, then, that we don't just read Scripture to memorize verses or facts, but in order to *know God*. When we approach the Bible in this way, we read differently. So often, we read as though we will have to take an exam on the content. If, though, we instead to hear God speak to us about Himself, to be taught truth *about God by God*, we will grow in our Vision of who God truly is.

We need to fill our minds with good and godly things that keep God in our awareness. Consider Paul's admonition to the Christians in Philippi:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any

excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things...and the God of peace will be with you.” Philippians 4:8-9

As we fill our minds with those things that are true (information) and allow that to draw us deeper into our knowledge and love of the Lord, our lives will be transformed and we will experience God’s abundance.

Intention

We cannot accomplish anything of worth without intention. We need to want to do something. Proper Vision will shape proper Intention, it will shape what we want to do. Much of our problem in life is that we don’t always want the right things for ourselves. We settle for the things of this world instead of what God actually wants for us. Our Vision is meant to be filled with God’s lofty desire for our lives and to shape our desire, or intention, for it.

One of the simple questions to ask ourselves every day is this: what do you want? What we want is rooted in our Vision of our best life. What we want spills over into what we pray for and how we allocate the resources of our life.

So what should we want? When we peel it all away, we should want God Himself above all other things. He is the great object of our desire. And when we are with Him, we have everything we truly need. Our Intention, then, should really be to stay connected with God in such a way that we are constantly aware of His presence.

Means

With Vision and Intention properly in place, we finally come to the Means of bringing our intentions to reality. Historically, the Church has referred to these as spiritual disciplines. They are the tools, or means, of keeping ourselves close to Jesus and filling our minds with the truth (information) and healthy thinking that reinforce and correct the ideas and images that shape our lives.

It is important to note, though, that these Means are engaged only after a proper Vision and right Intentions are cultivated. Otherwise, the disciplines we engage will not work well. The disciplines we engage must align with the Intentions and Vision of our heart.

For example, if what I truly want is comfort in life, not having to experience any unpleasantness or difficulty, then I will pray for that and I will read the Bible believing that if I do, I will get what I want. I want it because I have the Vision (ideas and images) of a good life that probably looks a lot like vacation.

If, however, what I want is to be near God no matter what, I will pray for open eyes, whether life is easy or hard, to see where God is and what He is doing. My Vision of a good life is knowing His presence and love. As a result, I will experience far greater peace, joy, and satisfaction in life.

Three tremendous Means for our lives are Scripture, Images, and Saints.

Scripture

As stated earlier, we need to “inwardly digest” Scripture. Not just selected verses here and there, but passages and entire contexts. For example, we shouldn’t just know that we should “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness [that] all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33), but how that falls into the sweep of the entire Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and its Vision of the abundant life of the Kingdom of God as found in a relationship with Jesus.

When the Story of Scripture becomes a part of us, then we find our individual story within it. We find that we are part of a divine plan for the restoration of all things in Christ. We find meaning, purpose, and direction in life.

Images

Images – visual, auditory, and written – can be used to direct our minds to Jesus. The things that we set our minds upon through our senses have great power. Use them!

Listen to music that fills your mind with echoes of God. Set your eyes upon things that reinforce your desire to be with God or that remind you of His truth, rather than things that feed your desire for things that draw you away from Him. Read Scripture in a way that gets the Vision of God into your bones. Read other literature that cultivates a desire for good and praiseworthy things.

Saints

We don't walk and live alone. We need other people around us as we follow Jesus – people who can help, encourage, exhort, and even correct us. The life of following Jesus is not easy and will often lead us into new and unfamiliar territory. One of the best things we can do is find guides, find those who are practitioners of the way of following Jesus. We need to find mature saints who can help us learn and grow.

These can be saints around us, or they can be the great saints of the past who have left a legacy and literature behind to help us. To lean upon them is not a sign of weakness, but of wisdom! They are one of the greatest Means God has given us for our transformation!

Conclusion

The life of the mind is critically important in the life of discipleship, the life of being conformed to the image of Christ. The concept of Vision, Intention, and Means is, in many ways, simple. But it is not simplistic. It contains within it all the robust complexity needed to handle life, yet it boils things down, every day, to how we choose to cultivate godly Vision and Intention, and appropriate Means to make them come to pass.

Reading Questions

1. Do you have any New Years' Resolutions? Any you'd like to share?
2. Have you ever experienced the disconnect between what you know you should do and how you actually behave? Why do you think that happens?
3. What are the four aspects of thought?
4. How do these four aspects interact with each other?

5. How do you think ideas and images are accumulated in our lives?
6. What are some ways that we can make our ideas and images more conscious and identifiable to ourselves?
7. What do you think of Dallas Willard's use of Vision, Intention, and Means as tools in our transformation? Which of these do you think needs work in your life?



Connection Practice

If images play a powerful role in the life of our minds, then dwelling upon images that draw us closer to God should impact us for good. Dwelling upon images, though, is not the same as just “looking” at something. To dwell requires time and attention. Jesus loved to teach with examples and stories that paint pictures for us to dwell upon. Spend some time dwelling upon Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15:11-32. Read it slowly and take note of the details, allowing them to paint the picture. Take note, too, of how you imagine the characters. How does the image of God in this parable compare to the way you relate to God? Are there ways in which this image needs to become a part of who you are?

Week Two

The Power of Feelings

Most people, when they think of feelings, think of their hearts. But where do feelings come from? And is there a connection between our thoughts and our feelings, between our minds and our hearts? Can we do something with our minds that changes how we feel?

Caveat

What follows is a discussion of the role of the mind in the shaping of our feelings. It is important to note that this is meant to be a discussion of the range of feelings that we would associate with the routine experience of life. However, there are times when many people experience clinical depression or anxiety. In fact, estimates are that one in five adults in America struggle with mental health. It is no surprise that the Bible mentions it in more than ?? verses. Depression and anxiety are complex issues that are unique to each individual. They are often helped through professional counselling and medication, and I would heartily recommend those courses of action to those who are struggling.

The following discussion is not suggesting that depression and anxiety are simple issues that can be swept away with a little study. And it certainly not suggesting that those who struggle with these common issues are to blame for a poor use of their minds. It is not that simple. While I firmly believe that there can be relief and freedom for those who suffer, and that it will likely involve some work in the use of the mind, I also firmly believe that it may require sustained work and medical help.

Thinking and Feeling

Feelings make us “feel alive!” They are one of the great blessings, and challenges, of life. As much as we would like to be motivated by reason alone, it is our feelings that animate and sustain us. They, like the rest of our lives, must be transformed if we are to see real and lasting change in our lives.

So what are our feelings? They encompass a wide range of felt sensations, desires, and emotions that motivate our lives – toward life or toward destruction of self and others.

One of the great challenges in modern life is that we are largely led by our feelings, not our minds. We make decisions based on how we feel. While that may not always be wrong, it assumes that our feelings are in line with truth and righteousness. We begin learning this approach to life very young, being told to listen to our hearts or to trust our feelings.

The challenge to this approach to life is that we begin to identify ourselves, and the truth, as how we feel and we begin to believe, deep down, that our feelings must be satisfied. But is that true? Do we really need to satisfy every desire and emotion that we experience?

Clearly the answer is no. We do not need to let fear, anxiety, anger, lust, hunger for power, woundedness, hurt pride, vengeance, or the like to define our lives. We can, instead, live in such a way that these things do not characterize our experience of life.

We need, then, a strategy not just of resisting these feelings when they arise, but of living in such a way that they rarely, if ever, arise. The aim is to avoid feelings that harm us and, at times, lead us into sin. Imagine what life could be like free from those destructive feelings, a life which is instead marked by love, joy, and peace!

To be honest, we really can't resist these feelings head-on with will-power. We might be able to for a while, but ultimately those feelings will overpower us. Denial and repression are not sustainable or effective means. Instead, we must replace destructive feelings with life-giving ones, and we must align our feelings in ways that make them constructive.

Sometimes, our desires are not inherently bad, but are improperly aligned. For example, the desire for food is a God-given feeling that keeps us alive. But if it gets improperly aligned, it turns into gluttony. Our sexual drive, likewise, is a gift from God to be used within the safety and blessing of marriage. But when it is not ruled by love, but instead is ruled by lust, it becomes destructive.

So what role does the mind play in all this?

To begin with, we need to use our mind to imagine self as free from destructive feelings. Using our imagination, we begin to see ourselves as capable of being something different. But it is harder than it sounds. Deep down, most of us feel like we were just "born this way," that we really can't change. And, as already

noted, that we are entitled to satisfy every emotion we experience. We struggle to envision ourselves as genuinely free.

Feelings are typically fostered and sustained, though, by ideas and images. Feelings are cultivated and animated by the life of our mind. In other words, what fills the life of our mind shapes the ideas and images that give rise to our feelings.

That means, though, that we can cultivate feelings that are associated with abundant life: love, joy, and peace. How? The Apostle Paul boils it all down to faith, hope, and love. He contemplates that in Romans 5:1-5:

Therefore, since we have been justified by *faith*, we have *peace* with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by *faith* into this grace in which we stand, and we *rejoice* in *hope* of the glory of God. Not only that, but we *rejoice* in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces *hope*, and *hope* does not put us to shame, because God's *love* has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

The flow Paul's thought is amazing. It is as we understand that we have been saved by grace through faith that we are able to see even our sufferings in a new way. This allows us to see that God is working for good in all things to make us like Jesus, producing the character of His life within us, and that transformation gives us hope in the midst of anything. And throughout it all, we will experience and be motivated by God's love, which is the result and confirmation of our faith in Christ's saving work.

First, note the repeated use of faith, hope, love, joy, and peace. Paul really does believe that these things are meant to flow in our lives!

Second, note that his understanding is that the information of the gospel and right thinking about it impacts our experience of feelings of love, hope, peace, and joy. The life of the mind, contemplating the truth of Christ, is related to how we feel.

Conclusion

We began by asking how the life of the mind is related to how we feel. Pulling all this together, we have two primary insights.

First, we need to be in-formed, formed by the truth making its home within us. The content of our faith as found in Scripture and the teaching of the Church (theology) matter! Knowing what Scripture says about who we are and who God is makes a huge difference in our lives.

Flowing from that, second, we need to hold this truth before our hearts by the use of our minds. As we contemplate this truth, thinking well and ruminating constantly upon it, we reshape our Vision, our ideas and images. This, in turn, corrects those bent ideas and images that so often give rise to destructive feelings and actions.

So once again, we see that we are integrated beings. Our hearts and feelings are deeply linked to the life of our minds. Information, right thinking, and life-giving feelings are all a part of the Vision, Intention, and Means that combine to produce a transformed life.

Reading Questions

1. Did you try the Connection Practice for last week? If so, what struck or helped you?
2. What do you think of the idea that we are often led by our feelings? What is good about that? What is potentially problematic?
3. Have you ever found that resisting feelings head-on hasn't worked in changing how you feel? Why do you think that is so?
4. It has been suggested that we need to replace unhelpful feelings rather than resist them, and that it would be even better if we could do that before they arise. What do you think of that strategy? How could it actually be implemented?

5. One of the reasons we struggle to cultivate constructive feelings is that we don't always believe that it is possible to live that way. How is that tied into our self-image?
6. How does Information, or in-formation, contribute to the cultivation of life-giving feelings?
7. What are some ways that we can use our minds to continually use this Information to shape our ideas and images?



Connection Practice

Many people find music to be a powerful devotional aid in their spiritual life because it can convey both information and feeling at the same time. Choose a few favorite hymns or devotional songs and listen to them this week. Try to get them stuck in your head. Take note of how they impact your Ideas and Images, and in turn, your feelings.

Week Three

Right Thinking Part One

So far, we have tried to show the connection between the life of our mind and the transformation of our lives, including our feelings. Information and right thinking have a deep impact on our hearts and lives. With that in mind, we now turn to the foundational teaching of Scripture as understood by the community of the Church. These essential truths are meant to form the Ideas and Images that so shape our lives.

Revelation: how can we know God?

These days, there seem to be as many opinions as to who God is as there are people to hold them! Many people will say there is a God, but wonder how we can really be sure of who He is.

Christianity begins with the belief that the God who created the entire universe has made Himself known to His creation. That revealing is what we call Revelation. We don't discover God, but rather, the infinite God has revealed Himself to His finite creation.

There are two broad categories of Revelation: General and Special. General Revelation simply means that God has made Himself known in Creation. Because God made all of it, we should expect to see His imprint in many places. "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made."(Romans 1:20). From the world around us, we learn that God is powerful, creative, orderly, and moral. We also see in the world around us, through the presence of many different religions, that God has created us all with a spiritual hunger. General Revelation points us to the existence of God and gives us glimpses of what He is like, but does not really tell us very much about who God is.

Special Revelation is God specifically revealing Himself to human beings in terms that they can understand. Special Revelation takes two forms: scripture and Jesus. "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son."(Hebrews 1:1-2). In the Old Testament, God revealed Himself through the words of prophets, through miracles, and through mighty acts. When the time was right, God sent

Jesus to give us the full and final revelation of God, to show humanity who God is and what He is like.

That brings us back to the question of how we can know God and be sure of what we do know of Him. The Bible is both a record of God's acts of special revelation and is special revelation. The Bible is God's Word spoken and God's Word speaking. As such, it has authority.

When we look at the way Jesus used the Old Testament, we find that He referred to the Old Testament as what God said. The early Church understood the Old Testament as God's Word, and recognized the Apostolic Teaching, the New Testament, as faithfully transmitting the teaching of Jesus. So how can we know God? Through the Special Revelation of the Bible. How can we be sure of what we know? Because in the Bible, God has chosen to reveal Himself to us. We do not have to guess as to who God is and what He is like – He has made Himself known. But at the same time, because He has made Himself known, we are not free to believe anything we want or to live in any way we choose.

Scripture, Tradition, and Reason

Why are there so many opinions about God? If the Bible is the authority in matters of Christian knowledge and practice, though, then why does it seem that there are so many differences of opinion? While that is not a simple question to answer, there are some things that can and should be said.

The classic formula in the Anglican Tradition was handed down by the theologian Richard Hooker. He spoke of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. Scripture, he said, was the primary and ultimate authority to which we must look. We understand Scripture through our God-given reason and within the bounds of the Tradition of the Church. If Scripture did not have something to say about a certain specific topic, for example church vestments, then we were to look to Tradition, and if it had nothing to say, then we looked to Reason. Ultimately, though, Reason and Tradition had to answer to Scripture. If any belief or practice is not contained in Scripture, it can be permitted, but it cannot be required to be believed or followed. If any belief or practice is contrary to Scripture, it must be rejected.

Ultimately, then, differences can be accorded to a distortion of the proper understanding of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. There are those who try to give equal weight to Scripture, Tradition, and Reason, saying that human reason in

philosophy and science can help correctly understand the faith. Therefore, modern scholars believe that they can decide which portions of Scripture are valid and which are not. There are those who would add Experience to the list of authorities, saying that how we feel about issues is as important as Reason, Tradition, and Scripture. What these different approaches do, though, is not acknowledge the authority of Scripture, but subordinate it to Reason, Tradition, and Experience.

That much said, it must be acknowledged that a lot of what passes as Scripture teaching is wanting in serious scholarship and the use of our God-given Reason. Properly used, Reason allows us to carefully study and apply God's word so that it is never used according to blind Tradition or to justify our pre-existing beliefs and experiences, but rather, is used as we seek to hear God speak in fresh and powerful ways to us daily.

The Nature of God: what we need to know

That brings us to the beginning of our discussion of God. We have asked how we can confidently know who God is, and we have found that the answer is through the careful and serious study of God's Word, the Bible. So what do we learn of God in Scripture?

The Attributes of God

What do we know about God? Two things need to be understood right away. First, God is spirit. He is not material, He is not flesh and blood. Because He is spirit, He exists in a realm that is beyond ours, different than ours. Second, God is personal. That doesn't mean, again, that He has a body, but it means that He is relational. He is not a force or energy or higher power, He is personal, and, being such, He relates as a person to a person.

We know, further, that He is:

Transcendent – God is separate from and different from His Creation in His essential being.

Immanent – God is present and active within His creation.

Infinite – God cannot be contained, He is beyond anything we can fully understand or imagine.

Omniscient – God has all knowledge and wisdom and thus knows all things in their proper perspective.

Omnipotent – God is all-powerful and is capable of accomplishing anything He wills.

Holy – God is unique and separate from all Creation, and is perfectly pure and good, unstained by evil.

Loving – God seeks the best for all Creatures and eternally give Himself to His creatures.

Righteous – God is just and must uphold rightness in His Creation.

Trinity

Christians confess God as Trinity, three distinct persons of one essential substance. This is, strictly speaking, a mystery. Mystery does not mean that we don't understand and are simply filling in the gap with a convenient word. Mystery means that it is beyond our comprehension. The Trinity is three distinct persons of one substance, and we cannot understand it because it is beyond our capacity to understand. The term "Trinity" is not itself in Scripture, but is an understanding of the witness of Scripture. That witness can be summarized as:

God is One (Deut 6:4 and Mk 12:29)

God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19 and 2 Cor 13:14)

The Father is God (Jn 20:17)

The Son is God (Jn 20:28 and Phil2:6)

The Holy Spirit is God (Matt 12:31 and Acts 5:3-4)

The Father is a distinct person

The Son is a distinct person

The Holy Spirit is a distinct person

Therefore, God is three persons but only One God.

What does it mean to be human?

Humanity as Created in God's Image

God's "Very Good" Creatures

What does it mean to be human? It seems silly that we should ask that question, but that is perhaps the greatest question any of us could ever try to answer. It is a question of identity. That said, it must be acknowledged that few people really begin to grapple with what it means to be human. So what does it mean to be a human being? We are:

Created Beings - We are created by God. We do not make ourselves, and have no independent existence. We are not cosmic accidents, but exist by the will of God. (Gen 1:26; Acts 17:24,26-28).

Physical Beings - We have bodies, and those bodies are good and wonderful creations from God. This also means that we are a part of all of creation. (Gen 2:7).

Intelligent Beings - We have minds that make us self-conscious and rational beings. We have the ability to think, communicate, reflect, and appreciate beauty.

Moral Beings - We have been created with a moral sense of right and wrong. While that faculty has been impaired, we all have a conscience and a capacity for moral discernment.

Social Beings - We are created with a need for relationships. We are not meant to be alone, but find ourselves enriched by knowing other people.

Sexual Beings - We are created with the ability to procreate and have been given both the desire for and pleasure in sex.

Spiritual Beings - We all have a spiritual yearning, what Pascal called, "a God-shaped void," that only God can fill. We not only have a yearning for something beyond ourselves, but we have the capacity to know and relate to God.

Whole Beings - While we frequently speak of the person as consisting of two or three parts (body, soul, and spirit), Scripture tends to speak of the person as a whole and undivided being. It can, at times, be helpful to speak of different aspects of our constitution, but ultimately, we cannot truthfully divide ourselves into neat pieces.

All of these aspects of being human are reflections of our having been created in the image of God. All of these attributes are understood as ways in which we have been created as those who are similar in quality to our God. But that immediately leads us to the next observation. We rarely find all of these aspects of humanity operating as they were intended. They are twisted and distorted. Why is that so?

Sin: The Human Problem

That brings us to the discussion of sin. In Scripture, no sooner do we hear what God created us to be, then we hear what we managed to do with His intention. God created humanity to live in a perfect relationship with Him. When humanity chose to disobey God, that perfect relationship was broken and sin entered into God's creation. Now, all are naturally rebellious toward God and unable to restore that perfect relationship.

Sin is an unpopular word, but one which Christians need to understand and reclaim. We begin by asking the age old question, "Am I sinful because I sin, or do I sin because I am sinful?" To put the question in slightly different terms, is sin an external description of my actions, or an internal problem. The witness of Scripture is that we commit sinful acts because our hearts are infected with sin. It is an internal problem.

Many people think that a "sinner" is the worst possible kind of person, someone who is almost completely evil. But that isn't what sin is! Sin is, at its root, a self-centeredness that wants to be autonomous and self-sovereign. To put it simply, sin is the desire to be God. What the Bible tells us is that every human being is infected with this disease. While some may allow that infection to run rampant and others may try to keep it in check, it is a universal problem, something we all have.

What are the effects of sin?

Our relationship with God

If sin is a self-centeredness that breaks our relationship with God, then sin, first of all, makes us unfit for the presence of our holy God. To put that in a slightly different way, in our sinfulness, we want to be God, and we cannot want ourselves to be God and God to be God at the same time! So sin breaks our relationship with God and makes us unfit for His presence.

Because sin is an infection we cannot overcome, it means that in God's sight, we are law-breakers and will be found guilty of having rebelled against Him. No matter how hard we try, we find ourselves unable to live the perfect life God calls us to.

We also become insensitive to God's Word, unable to hear and respond to the many ways in which God speaks to us. Even when we do hear and understand, we fail to respond, and we enter into a downward spiral of increasing ignorance of God and God's ways.

Our relationship with others

Once our relationship with God is broken, that brokenness plays itself out in our relationships with those around us. Sin causes conflict and division as our ego-centric pride drives us to hate, prejudice, and competition with those around us. Rather than treating all people with the inherent dignity every human being possesses, we treat people as a means to an end, as a way to meet our goals and wants. Rather than serving one another in love, we use force and coercion to get what we want. We begin to live in fear, afraid to be open to others, living behind the protection of a false front while inside we are filled with guilt, self-contempt, hurt, and loneliness.

Our relationship with ourselves

Sin also creates a conflict in our innermost beings. We lose our direction in life and lose the ability to see ourselves in an objective manner. We tend to think either too highly or poorly of ourselves, and we run from God's assessment of who we are. We struggle with self-acceptance and self-confidence, not knowing that we are special and especially loved by God. Instead, we become filled with shame.

Our relationship with creation

Not only does sin destroy our relationship with other persons, but it has affected our relationship with the whole of God's creation! We exploit the resources of this world rather than steward them in God's name. We cause harm all around us, often caring nothing for those who will come after us, because we are focused on our own desires.

This is the bad news. God created us perfect, but the infection of sin has broken our relationship with God, with one another, and with ourselves. This infection is in every part of who we are, and we are powerless to do anything about it. But while this is the bad news, it is not the end of the story!

Living in a Fallen World: A Critical Implication

It is absolutely critical to understand the difference between creation as we now experience it and creation as God made it. We do not live in the reality of what God intended, we live in the reality of God's good creation corrupted by sin. It is not wholly ruined, but it is not as it should be. God created us with free will, without which we could never respond to God in love, knowing that the very will which could please Him with obedience could also cause ruin with disobedience. We chose disobedience, and the world we now live in is corrupted with sin.

Why is that so important? First, because we cannot pin the blame for all that is wrong with the world on God. God didn't make it this way, we did. In fact, even though we made it this way, God was willing to pay everything to make it right again. Second, we cannot simply look at how things are now, and blindly assert that what is is what God wanted. The world we live in, while deeply loved by God, is not what He wants it to be, and we are not free to jump from what is to what ought to be without first coming back to hear God's analysis of the situation.

Reading Questions

1. Did you try last week's Connection Practice? If so, what did you learn or notice from it?

2. Has your understanding of God changed through the course of your life? How? What caused the change?
3. How is God's revelation of Himself an act of love?
4. What are some characteristics of humanity as created by God?
5. Are only Christians able to know and do right things? Why or why not?
6. What is sin and how does it affect our relationship with God? With nature? With others? With ourselves?
7. How does the Bible's teaching on sin and humanity impact our understanding on such things as social justice? Sexuality? Economics? Environmental issues?



Connection Practice

Each day this week, pray the Nicene or Apostles' Creed as a declaration of belief, not just a statement of "correct theology." With each article of belief, think through how you hold that belief and how it does, or should, shape your life. For example, when you pray, "I believe in God...creator of heaven and earth," consider what that means for how you relate to scientific belief, the goodness of creation, and how you take care of all the things in your life that God created (and owns!).

Week Four

Right Thinking Part Two

Who is Jesus?

Now we ask the question, who is Jesus? Jesus is one of those people virtually everyone, at least in the western world, has heard of, and yet, as we will see, very few people actually know. As Christians, though, this is the most important thing to understand. As the great 20th Century theologian Karl Barth once said, “Show me how it stands with your Christology and I shall tell you who you are.” (Barth, 66)

Fully Human, Fully Divine: The Orthodox Teaching

The orthodox Christian teaching regarding the Person of Christ is that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. So, in the one person of Christ, we have two natures. This, just like the Trinity, is a mystery. We cannot completely understand how Jesus can be fully human and fully divine, all we can do is affirm that we know it to be true. What can we know about Jesus? From Scripture, we know that:

Jesus is fully human:

- Hunger (Matt 21:18)
- Fatigue (John 4:6)
- Anger (Mark 11:15-17)
- Love (Mark 10:21)
- Sadness (John 11:32-36)
- Tempted (Mark 1:13)
- Learned (Luke 2:46-52)

Jesus is fully divine:

Jesus' acts

- Forgiving sins (Mark 2:5)
- Judging the World (Matthew 25:31-32, 40, 45)

Jesus' teachings

- “I am” (John 6:35, 8:12, 11:25, 14:6)
- “he who receives me receives the one who sent me” (Matthew 10:40)
- “anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9)
- Jesus' self-understanding
- Messiah (Mark 14:61-62)
- God the Son (John 8:58)

“My Lord and my God” (John 20:28)

“I and the Father are one” (John 10:30)

The early Church

“The Son is...the exact representation of his (God) being” (Hebrews 1:3)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...the Word became flesh” (John 1:1, 14)

“God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Jesus)”
(Colossians 1:19)

What is the Cross all about?

A close reading of the gospel accounts reveals that Jesus saw His entire ministry as leading to one goal: the cross. Indeed, if we only consider the one memorial act Jesus commanded His followers to do in remembrance of Him, Holy Communion, we find that the whole purpose of Jesus’ life and ministry was to die as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

On the cross, Jesus wasn’t the victim of hate or of some cosmic tragedy. Jesus chose the cross freely. While we may see hate and the suffering of an innocent man there, it is nothing that He did not choose to endure. So, in seeking to understand Jesus’ work, as well as His teaching, we must begin with the cross.

The first thing we must note is that in discussing the cross, we are not speaking only of Jesus’ death, but Jesus’ death and resurrection together. Any attempt to separate the two must ultimately fail, for the cross without the resurrection is failure, and the resurrection without the cross accomplishes nothing for us.

Just as a precious gem has many facets and cannot be fully appreciated from only one angle, so also must we consider the beauty of the cross from many angles. Here, we will consider four.

Love

Perhaps the best known verse in all the Bible is John 3:16, “For God so loved the world...” Almost as well known is John’s “definition” of who God is when he wrote, “God is love...” What we see in the cross is the revelation of God’s love for the world. It is not a love we are free to define in whatever way we want, but it is an expression of the very heart of God. In the cross,

then, we are told, “If you want to know how God feels about you and what He is willing to do for you, then look at the cross.” Indeed, that is why Paul was able to write in Romans, “nothing is able to separate us from the love of God for us in Christ Jesus.”

Sacrifice

Not only was the cross an expression of love, it accomplished something very necessary. All through the Old Testament, God called His people to worship Him in His presence in the Temple. In order to enter into His Holy presence, though, sin needed to be dealt with. God gave worshipers a means of dealing with sin through sacrifice. Before entering into worship, the worshiper had to offer a spotless animal in sacrifice, signifying the costliness of sin as it took the life of an innocent animal. It was a constant reminder to the worshiper that God was holy and sin was a serious problem. Through sacrifice, then, God dealt with our sin and sought to restore our relationship with Himself.

Jesus saw the cross as a sacrifice that took away sin, He Himself being the Lamb of God whose blood was shed for the sins of the whole world, making it possible for us to enter into God’s presence.

As a sacrifice for the sins of the world, Jesus was dying in our place for our sins. Because He was God, He was able to offer the perfect sacrifice we were unable to offer. Because He was human, He was able to offer Himself as the sacrifice that humanity needed to offer. Just as in the Old Testament an animal died in place of the worshiper, Jesus died for the sins of the whole world in our place. He did for us what we were unable to do for ourselves: He offered the “full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world...” (Prayer Book, 116)

Through Jesus’ sacrifice, we are forgiven and reconciled. Reconciliation is necessary where relationship has been broken. Our Holy God created us in order to love us, but we, in our sin, walked far from Him. With sin atoned for and forgiveness offered through the cross, we are restored to a right relationship with God through the merits of what Jesus accomplished for us.

Redemption

The language of redemption has to do with freedom from slavery. The Bible teaches very clearly that we are all slaves to sin, that no matter how hard we try, sin wields power over us. Through the cross, Jesus was victorious over sin, and the result of sin, which is death. Thus, as we are united with Christ, we die to sin and are set free from its power over us. We are free to become what God created us to be.

Resurrection

There is great ignorance when it comes to resurrection. Many people see it simply as “coming back to life,” or even as merely, “spiritual life.” But that is not what resurrection is. Resurrection is not merely coming back to life in the same body as we now have, as in resuscitation. Resurrection is a qualitatively new bodily existence. It is life in a body, a body that is both like and unlike the one we now have. Jesus, in His resurrection, received a body that was able to eat, talk and be felt, and yet, at the same time, move through locked doors. Most important, though, it was a body that not only would not die, but could not die.

So what did Jesus’ resurrection mean? Was it more than just a happy ending to the cross? Absolutely! In order to really understand what Jesus’ resurrection means, we need to understand, at least in the most basic sense, the promise God had made to His special people Israel.

In the Old Testament, God formed a special people for Himself: Israel. He promised them that there would come a day when He would send a servant, the Messiah, who would usher in a New Age, the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom of God, all that was wrong with creation would be repaired. That means that sin and evil would be destroyed, along with all its consequences. There would therefore be no more suffering, sickness, or broken relationships with self, others, creation, or God. That means there would be forgiveness of sin, reconciliation, and freedom from the power of sin. It meant that there would be no death, and as a sign of that victory, there would be resurrection life. In that day, God’s perfect rule over all His creation would be made manifest and all the nations would finally come to worship the One True God of all the universe.

When Jesus was resurrected from the dead, it was confirmation that in and through Jesus, God had finally acted to fulfill all these long awaited promises. The end of this age dominated by sin and death had come, and the new age of God's Kingdom was beginning to break in. And so this Jesus was recognized as the Son of God and the King of the Universe.

How do we become Christians?

What would you say if someone were to ask you, "How do you become a Christian?" Do you know? In considering how we become Christians, we must begin by distinguishing the two sides of becoming Christian: God's side and our side.

God's Work: Regeneration & Justification

We have already begun to look at the basis for God making us Christian – the cross of Christ. But how do we make what Jesus offers us there our own? The Bible teaches that God Himself, by the work of the Holy Spirit, actually changes us from within, giving us new life, life that is able to turn to Him. This new life, or new creation, is what we call regeneration. It is God working in our heart and making us able to believe in Jesus.

When does this take place and how do we know? In some ways, this is the wrong question to ask because it seeks to fully comprehend the mystery of God's work in saving us. But in other ways, it is a question we need to answer for pastoral reasons.

Some people can point to an exact time and place when they first believed. It is for some a highly emotional experience, a conversion experience. For others, though, it is a long, perhaps even life-long, gradual process of growing awareness. This is particularly true of those raised in truly Christian homes. Either way, the real test of regeneration is not experience, but a life that recognizes the Lordship of Jesus and shows evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us.

As soon as we respond to Jesus in faith, God declares that we are "justified." In some ways, this is the language of the courtroom. Standing in court before God the Judge, we are charged with the sins we have committed. We are all guilty, but God the Judge has sent His Son to pay the penalty due our sins and we are acquitted. By God's declaration, it is "just as if I'd" never sinned. We also need to add the

element of relationship to this, though, because we are looking at far more than just outward acts and deeds. To be truly righteous in God's eyes, we have to be living in a right relationship with Him, and that includes not just "doing right and avoiding wrong," but being in a close personal relationship with Him. It is the difference between a student who does all the assignments as directed and a child who delights in being a son or daughter.

Our Response of Conversion: Repentance & Faith

Conversion is our part in becoming Christian. God regenerates and justifies us, we turn from sin (repentance) and turn to God (faith). Conversion, then, is repentance and faith. Repentance literally means to turn away. Used in our relationship with God, repentance means turning away from all that God calls wrong (sin). It involves, then, recognizing and agreeing with God's assessment of our situation, and then, in accordance with it, letting go of that which God deems wrong. That is the turning away.

But with it must always come the "turning to" of faith. Faith is knowledge that leads to action. It is knowledge of the mind and personal knowledge of the heart, it is knowledge about and knowledge of. Saving faith is that faith that believes that what Jesus did on the cross is the only means of salvation and then trusts the truth of that promise from God and acts on it. This kind of faith is well described in the famous story of the great tight rope walker Blondin, who had a cable strung over Niagara Falls. He walked back and forth over the wire and the people cheered. He carried a bag of potatoes back and forth and the crowd cheered. Then he asked a young boy, "Do you believe I could carry a boy across and back?" "I believe it!" the boy said. "Good, hop on and I will take you," Blondin replied. The boy sunk back into the crowd. Faith is belief about Jesus and trust of Jesus that always results in action.

How can we be sure of our faith?

Faith is not a feeling! Feelings are wonderful, but they depend upon far too many external circumstances. Just as Ebenezer Scrooge told the ghost of Marley that he (Marley) was the result of eating some bad food, that there was, "more gravy than grave," about him, so we also tend to waver in faith because we mistake faith for a feeling. Feelings depend on sleep, exercise, food, stress, and countless other external factors. Faith, though, depends on God, who He is and what He has said.

There are three primary assurances for our faith. First, there is the work of Jesus. We put our trust in what He accomplished for us on the cross and for the love revealed there. We need never wonder how God feels about us or about His commitment to us. He loves us so much that He sent Jesus to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Because Jesus died, we can have eternal life. And if ever we feel like it is too good to be true, we simply remind ourselves that it doesn't depend on us, it depends on Jesus!

Second, we have the word of the Father. We are given assurance in the Father's promises to us. Ultimately, we have to say with Paul, that if the Father did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, then nothing can ever separate us from God's love for us. He will keep His promises! We also understand that all of Scripture bears witness to God's loving pursuit of His creation. From start to finish in Scripture, God is trying to form a people, a family, for Himself, to live in His blessing and grace as they come into line with who He is.

Third, we have the witness of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' resurrection was not the end of the story. As incredible and foundational as it was, and is, it was the means to an end. Because of Easter and the Ascension (Jesus' return to the Father), the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit was made possible. Every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, and because He lives within us, He leaves evidence of His presence and work. This is the witness of the Holy Spirit. Living within us, the Holy Spirit transforms our inner being to make us like Jesus in holiness and empowers us to continue to do the work Jesus was doing. It is a life-long process, to be sure, but it is one that leaves marks of progress as time goes by. As long as we are progressing in the faith, we know that the Holy Spirit is at work in us, and if we know that, we know that our faith has received God's saving grace in Jesus!

Reading Questions

1. Did you try praying the Nicene or Apostles' Creed last week? If so, was it a different experience than how you normally engage the Creeds? How?
2. What you say to someone who asks you "Who is Jesus? How do you know?"

3. What difference would it make if Jesus were not fully God? Fully man?
4. Why did Jesus die?
5. What would you say to someone who says “All roads lead to God?”
6. What is God’s role in our salvation? What is ours?
7. Try to define Regeneration, Justification, Repentance, and Faith for someone who has never been to church.
8. What would you say to someone who asked “How do I become a Christian?”



Connection Practice

If images play a powerful role in the life of our minds, then dwelling upon images that draw us closer to God should impact our lives for good. Meditate upon Matthew 11:18-30 in light of this study series. Picture yourself standing before Jesus as looks directly at you and speaks these words to you. Visualize His face with an expression of His unstoppable love for you, His chosen sheep. Allow Him to teach you as He shapes your ideas, images, and information.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

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Compline

The Officiant begins

Our help is in the Name of the Lord;

People The maker of heaven and earth.

The Officiant continues

Let us humbly confess our sins to Almighty God.

Silence may be kept. The Officiant and People then say

Almighty God and Father, we confess to you,
to one another, and to the whole company of heaven,
that we have sinned, through our own fault,
in thought, and word, and deed,
and in what we have left undone.

For the sake of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ,
have mercy upon us, forgive us all our sins,
and by the power of your Holy Spirit
raise us up to serve you in newness of life,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

The Officiant alone says

May Almighty God grant us forgiveness of our sins,
and the grace and comfort of his Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Officiant O God, make speed to save us.

People O Lord, make haste to help us.

Officiant Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;

People as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.

Except in Lent, add Alleluia.

One or more of the following Psalms are sung or said.

Psalm 4 *Cum invocarem*

- 1 Answer me when I call, O God, defender of my cause; *
you set me free when I am hard-pressed;
have mercy on me and hear my prayer.
- 2 “You mortals, how long will you dishonor my glory? *
how long will you worship dumb idols
and run after false gods?”
- 3 Know that the Lord does wonders for the faithful; *
when I call upon the Lord, he will hear me.
- 4 Tremble, then, and do not sin; *
Speak to your heart in silence upon your bed.
- 5 Offer the appointed sacrifices *
and put your trust in the Lord.
- 6 Many are saying,
“Oh, that we might see better times!” *
Lift up the light of your countenance upon us, O Lord.
- 7 You have put gladness in my heart, *
more than when grain and wine and oil increase.
- 8 I lie down in peace; at once I fall asleep; *
for only you, Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Psalm 31:1-5 In te, Domine, speravi

- 1 In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame: *
deliver me in your righteousness.
- 2 Incline your ear to me; *
make haste to deliver me.
- 3 Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe,
for you are my crag and my stronghold; *
for the sake of your Name, lead me and guide me.
- 4 Take me out of the net that they have secretly set for me, *

for you are my tower of strength.
5 Into your hands I commend my spirit, *
for you have redeemed me,
O Lord, O God of truth.

Psalm 91 Qui habitat

1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High *
abides under the shadow of the Almighty.
2 He shall say to the Lord,
“You are my refuge and my stronghold, *
my God in whom I put my trust.”
3 He shall deliver you from the snare of the hunter *
and from the deadly pestilence.
4 He shall cover you with his pinions,
and you shall find refuge under his wings; *
his faithfulness shall be a shield and buckler.
5 You shall not be afraid of any terror by night, *
nor of the arrow that flies by day;
6 Of the plague that stalks in the darkness, *
nor of the sickness that lays waste at mid-day.
7 A thousand shall fall at your side
and ten thousand at your right hand, *
but it shall not come near you.
8 Your eyes have only to behold *
to see the reward of the wicked.
9 Because you have made the Lord your refuge, *
and the Most High your habitation,
10 There shall no evil happen to you, *
neither shall any plague come near your dwelling.
11 For he shall give his angels charge over you, *
to keep you in all your ways.
12 They shall bear you in their hands, *

- lest you dash your foot against a stone.
- 13 You shall tread upon the lion and adder; *
you shall trample the young lion and the serpent
under your feet.
- 14 Because he is bound to me in love,
therefore will I deliver him; *
I will protect him, because he knows my Name.
- 15 He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; *
I am with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and bring him to honor.
- 16 With long life will I satisfy him, *
and show him my salvation.

Psalm 134 *Ecce nunc*

- 1 Behold now, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, *
you that stand by night in the house of the Lord.
- 2 Lift up your hands in the holy place and bless the Lord; *
the Lord who made heaven and earth bless you out of Zion.

At the end of the Psalms is sung or said

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.

Bible Study occurs at this time.

If time is short after Bible Study, consider taking prayer requests, praying for one another, and closing with one of the collects on page 6 or 7.

Officiant Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit;
People For you have redeemed me, O Lord, O God of truth.
Officiant Keep me as the apple of your eye;
People Hide me under the shadow of your wings.

Lord, have mercy [upon us].

Christ, have mercy [upon us].

Lord, have mercy [upon us].

Officiant and People

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass
against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

<i>Officiant</i>	O Lord, hear our prayer;
<i>People</i>	And let our cry come to you.
<i>Officiant</i>	Let us pray.

The Officiant then says one or more of the following Collects. Other appropriate Collects may also be used.

Visit this place, O Lord, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy; let your holy angels dwell with us to preserve us in peace; and let your blessing be upon us always; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O Lord; and by your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of your only Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this life may rest in your eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Look down, O Lord, from your heavenly throne, illumine this night with your celestial brightness, and from the children of light banish the deeds of darkness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

A Collect for Saturdays

We give you thanks, O God, for revealing your Son Jesus Christ to us by the light of his resurrection: Grant that as we sing your glory at the close of this day, our joy may abound in the morning as we celebrate the Paschal mystery; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

One of the following prayers may be added

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. *Amen. or this*

O God, your unfailing providence sustains the world we live in and the life we live: Watch over those, both night and day, who work while others sleep, and grant that we may never forget that our common life depends upon each other's toil; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Prayer requests and free intercessions and thanksgivings may be offered.

If time permits, the Officiant and People say or sing the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32) with this Antiphon

Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping; that awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace.

Lord, now let your servant depart in peace,
according to your word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared before the face of all people;
to be a light to lighten the Gentiles,

and to be the glory of your people Israel.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world
without end. Amen.

Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping; that awake
we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace.

In Easter Season, add Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

<i>Officiant</i>	Let us bless the Lord.
<i>People</i>	Thanks be to God.

The Officiant concludes with the following

The Lord Almighty grant us a peaceful night and a perfect end. Amen.

Or this

The almighty and merciful Lord, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless us and keep us, this night and evermore. Amen.

PRAYER REQUESTS