3. What does it mean for you to walk in the way of the cross?

I understand “walking in the way of the cross” to most fully mean, “walking in the way of Christ.” To me, this is the very foundation of our faith. The Gospel, the good news, lies in the person of Jesus.

I love the way the term “Christian” originated. Early followers of Jesus were called “followers of the Way” – the way of Christ – how he lived, what he demonstrated, and what he taught. It was only when outsiders observed these followers as being so “Christlike,” that they called them “Christians,” meaning in effect “little Christs.”

The Gospel is beautifully embodied in John 14:6: “I am the way, the truth and the life…no one comes to the Father accept by me.” I believe Jesus is saying “I am the way”…in other words, the way I am teaching, the way I am living and demonstrating for you…this is the way! This is the “truth”…as to how God originally intended for us to live. And living this way leads to “life” abundant, life in its fullness, for ourselves and our world.

Therefore, the way to know God most fully is to follow in Jesus’ footsteps. I believe God is discovered, encountered and increasingly revealed to us by following the way of Jesus. Religion has often inoculated people against the real Jesus, however when the Jesus of the Gospels is presented without the trappings, people are irresistibly drawn to him.

Living this “way of Jesus,” which inherently means living in the way of the cross, perhaps most clearly means living according to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. This entails living sacrificially – a life of kindness, mercy, compassion, humility, selflessness and forgiveness. Over the centuries the Christian faith became focused on “right belief” as opposed to “right action” - developing into a creedal faith - where creeds form the foundation of our belief and this has often led to exclusive thinking (“who is in” or “who is out”). I believe that one of the greatest needs of Christianity at this time is a rediscovery of the Sermon on the Mount as the way to live. Suppose at every worship service we said together the Sermon on the Mount, prefacing it with, “I believe in the Sermon on the Mount and in its way of life, and I intend, with God’s help, to live it.” It is likely that the Church would look very different.

I love the first Christian creed, long before the Apostles’ or Nicene Creeds. It was simply, “Jesus is Lord.” It was a creed of practice. It meant that if Jesus is Lord, then he is Lord of all in one’s life, which has great bearing on how we live - living compassionately, furthering justice, living sacrificially, embracing all, etc. This is living out the “kingdom of God.” And I would see it the role of a bishop to model, inspire and encourage this. All this profoundly affects how I see leadership, which I understand as “leading from the middle” - collaborative, relational and participatory. – Paul Gordon-Chandler

The Way of the Cross is a metaphor, which translates the Gospel of Christ into every facet of life and ministry.

The Way of the Cross is a path of suffering—the via dolorosa. I have walked that road several times in Jerusalem on pilgrimage, the members of our group walking and praying together, taking turns
carrying a wooden cross. That experience of traveling along the way of Jesus translates to the church walking together with all those who suffer, sharing the burden of the crosses they carry. Because we have walked with Jesus through many Lenten journeys, we know what it means to accompany those who suffer in mind, body, or spirit; those who have suffered from any form of discrimination or dehumanization.

The Way of the Cross is also a path of joy and victory. St. Paul offers us this hope when he writes, “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:57). Because we have celebrated Easter and are children of the Resurrection, we proclaim a message of great hope to the world. This truth translates into a church whose ministry brings the gifts of grace, mercy, absolution, reconciliation, and rebirth.

The Way of the Cross is a path of love. We do not love only when it is convenient, or when the recipients are acting in a love-able way. The Church loves first—“We love because God first loved us” (I John 4:19). This translates into a Church whose members are willing to be inconvenienced for others. By God’s grace we transform relationships of hate, division, fear, and discrimination into relationships with the capacity to hear, reflect, empathize, and advocate for those from cultures and traditions different from our own.

Finally, the Way of the Cross is a path of peace and rest. Jesus invited his disciples to “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” The Church is a place of sabbath rest. This translates into a church which welcomes members and non-members alike to step into our inherited church buildings and into our Fresh Expressions of faith, to be refreshed. It also means that ministers (both lay and ordained) also receive needed rest. The ministry of the Way of the Cross in suffering, joy and love requires rest in order to be sustained.

Sustained ministry in the Way of the Cross must have balance in order to be effective and to grow. The minister or congregation centered in prayer and worship, but not creatively engaged in the community, can become isolated and may perish by attrition. By contrast, the minister or congregation which is always giving, always participating, can become burned out without prayer, recreation, worship, and rest.

This is my walk in the Way of the Cross. I participate in the suffering of others every day; yet the hope and joy in the victory of Jesus sustain me. I’ve seen the love of Jesus transform my own life and have watched this love transform many other lives. By ending and beginning each day in prayer, I’m reminded that the Way of the Cross is not my way, but God’s way, and in God’s way I find rest. – David Duprey

“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Walking the way of the cross means honoring Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross by living the life model that he gave us – walking the way of love. In practice, this is well summed up in the Baptismal Covenant of the Episcopal Church—that we “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves . . . strive for justice and peace among all people . . . and respect the dignity of every human being.” These words serve as my moral compass and the framework from which I live my life.
The role of the church and its body at its most basic is to be God’s love in the world and to restore all people to unity with God. We have both a responsibility and an opportunity to model a different way of being at a time when our world desperately needs loving models. People are no longer coming to church because they are tired of the harsh judgments and the hypocrisy that have come to be emblematic of Christianity in America. As agents of God’s love and grace, we can counter this negative bias by creating loving communities of healing and wholeness and welcome, whether the inherited church or a fresh expression of church.

I try to live my life according to Jesus’ model, working to build the Kingdom of God on Earth. I am also keenly aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit’s movement in my life and am comfortable with the mystical, spiritual aspects of faith. This is exemplified by the idea of continual prayer as found in the Apostle Paul's first letter to Thessalonica: "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus." For me this is an attitude of the heart, of gratitude and joy in Christ. This continual prayer sustains both my spiritual and emotional life.

As it says in the Episcopal catechism, The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love. We are the church, and we have so much to offer the world. Preach a gospel of love and acceptance. Live lives of gratitude and joy. Be agents of reconciliation and unity. Look always to God for guidance.

Walking the way of the cross is to walk in love, prayerfully and with joy. I hope to walk with you as your Bishop as our Diocese models the life of Jesus, shares God’s love with the world, and makes loving disciples of God’s people. – Mary Erickson