



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE REV. LINZI STAHLECKER, CURATE  
THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, MAY 15, 2022  
ACTS 11:1-18; PSALM 148; REVELATION 21:1-6; JOHN 13:31-35

## LOVE IS A PROCESS

**John 13:31-35** [*At the last supper, when Judas had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*]

Who am I? What should I hope for? What should I do?

These are fundamental human questions.

Last Sunday, Dean Thomason shared a quote in his sermon, a quote attributed to the late Dean of Salisbury Cathedral. The end of that quote describes the Cathedral as a proclamation of the Christian *Way*, a way by which human beings can find help – in their search for the answer to the fundamental questions: Who am I? What should I hope for? What should I do?

So, Who am I?

How might I describe *me*? My tendency first, if I'm honest, would be to conceptualize myself as an object, of sorts, an object that can be described, and that's located in a specific time and place. And this would be partially true, but not the whole story of me. Given I'm a living being, nothing within me, or around and about me is actually fixed or permanent. So, rather than conceptualizing myself as an object, perhaps I should more accurately also think of myself as an ongoing process. Just like the world around me and the universe that holds us all I am in a constant state of change, and transformation, responding to

and influencing countless macro and micro processes and systems that are in motion in my body and in the world around it.

I know this to be true, and yet I will still default to conceptualizing myself in a similar way to the *things* in the world around me, as a kind of “object,” a somewhat fixed entity. I am constantly tempted to see reliable, dependable permanence, or changelessness, where actually, and really, there is none.

Reality, of which I am a part, reality as we know it exists through scientific exploration, is in constant motion, it is in a constant state of change, as am I. Yet the culture I’ve been shaped by, and the English language I use, doesn’t reflect that reality very well – the concepts I use frame reality with a preference for permanence, for objectivity.

In this cultural mix, then, it’s of little surprise that *ideas*, ideas about the world, about other people: ideas about race, sexuality, gender, ability, nationality; *opinions, beliefs*, as well as our own *self-understanding*, can *seem* fixed and objectified. In this cultural mix, ideas are something we grasp and hold, they are owned, just like an object is owned or possessed. But when opinions, or beliefs, become *like* objects, *like* possessions, there

can arise the temptation to treat them like actual objects: to want to hold on to them, especially if they are long-held or inherited, to see them as part of our estate, our worth; there can arise the temptation to defend them, even with violence, or killing, or war.

Ownership is important in this cultural space we live in, it’s valued and defended, so it’s easy to be deceived into thinking that the possession and the ownership of ideas and beliefs, judgements and opinions is a part of *who we are*. These “objects” of thought. Often inherited.

Their endurance and resistance to change is valued. This is so interesting, because nothing in our entire known cosmos is static, nothing, it is all in a state of change, and yet certain ideas and opinions are held as if permanent and fixed.

There is a strand of thought within the Anglican tradition, the tradition within which this Episcopal Church is located, that stands in sharp contrast to this cultural value system... it emphasizes that Christian faith is a “way” of life, of living, a process, of sorts. That the lived actions of the Christian community are *the way* that the virtues of faith, hope, and love are realized out in the

world. This strand of thought within the Anglican tradition believes that it is our human actions that shape and define the human person. We may identify as Christians, as followers of Jesus, but until that identity is lived into the world through relationship, it remains merely an idea we hold, a belief we possess, a mere object of our thought.

Being a follower of Jesus in this tradition places priority not on the beliefs we hold, but on the care we take of one another, it places a priority on our pastoral presence in and response to the world – this is prioritized over and sometimes against, seemingly fixed long-held, inherited, and cultural norms, long-held traditions, or the established opinions of the dominant majority or those in positions of power.

This Anglican way of being and living and responding acknowledges the complexity of each individual, and the different and shifting societies and cultures in which each of our lives is located. There is an ongoing and dynamic ‘dance,’ if you like, of pastoral care, with matters of social justice, the tradition of the church, and the cultural reality of the world around us – the constantly shifting and changing reality of the world - in which this

is all located. It is a process, a slow and a complex one, and one within which nothing of the human person is fixed, nothing actually stays the same.

This way of being, like all of Creation, is alive and in motion! It is ever-changing and responsive, it calls for our attention, our effort. Born of love, this way of being prioritizes care, and so it’s rarely easy, and it’s certainly not speedy. I believe this is the way of love Jesus calls us all to live.

This life isn’t about collecting and storing up objects, be those objects material possessions, or the “objects” of inherited cultural norms or societal expectations. This life is about being in relationship, guided and held together by love and the living presence of God. It is about being in dynamic, shifting, changing and complicated relationship with one another and the world around us, it’s about being transformed daily by our participation and care in those relationships, and through the duration of our lives by that *process* of love and of being loved.

We are living in a culture, and it’s *the culture* that values the possession of objects. And in this culture, there is an illusory simplicity to a life centered on the collection and

protection of objects, it is a life in which other people are seen and treated as objects of a sort, in which beliefs and held opinions, are possessed as objects of a sort. And in which God, also, is often treated as an object to be grasped.

And, we are part of a spiritual tradition that has long prioritized our *participation* in this life over the accumulation of objects. And this is this, I think, a wise and suitable response to the actual relational and dynamic reality of our universe, and of our lives; because this *is* a reality of change, of ongoing process, of dynamic interconnection, transformation, of life-filled interdependence; we live, despite learned, enculturated conceptualizations, in an ever-shifting tension and dance of order and chaos. We are participants in it.

And so, back to those fundamental questions ... Who am I? What should I hope for? And What should I do?

Among many other things, I am an ever-changing, beloved child of God, called into relationship with you, and with the world around me, and with God, and, as such, love is my source and my guide and my reason for living.

*What should I hope for?*

I believe I should hope for the ongoing transformation of my own self, and this world, into God's Kingdom reality, both already here, and still... not yet realized.

*And, What should I do?*

I believe I should participate, cultivate, practice – I should join in, actively, proactively, in the complicated and sometimes difficult slow dance of love and care as it meets with acquired knowledge, and inherited culture and tradition. I should intentionally participate in the process of transformation: I should listen, respond, think, continually consider, perhaps re-evaluate, always remain open to learning from another's experience, always remain open to having my mind changed.

I should slowly discern the presence of God before rushing to quick judgement. I should *participate* in this complex and ever-changing world, showing my love through the ways I speak and act and listen and care. I should *practice* love, as Jesus commands, because love is a process.