

Deep Dive



WHAT I BELIEVE

My Perspectives on Theology, Christian Faith, and Practice

of JOHN JUNO SONG



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Introduction

My enduring interest in Christian theology, philosophy and mysticism, near death experience at the age of eighteen, and personal encounter with the living God manifested in divine light at the age of twenty-one, and my lifelong search for life's meaning and divine truth, inform my formation of Christian faith. I call myself an “**integral Christian**” which simply means I embrace and am open to all things that support truth and reality. The following is a summary of my core Christian beliefs.

I don't expect you to agree with everything I believe in. Instead, I encourage you to think for yourself and reflect deeply in these areas of Christian life. It is my hope that my sharing will be a conversational starter and an impetus in developing and forming your own living faith.

This is a lot to take in all at once. To get the most out this reading, I recommend that you go slow because less is more. Read one topic, pause, reflect, and let it seep into your mind and heart.



Daily Mantra

Show Up, Trust, You'll Be Blessed!

I show up (with full presence),

trust (in the benevolent God who is conspiring to help me
come into the fullness of my being),

I'll be blessed (the work of grace will reveal itself).

Nine Permissions

(I Give to Myself and Offer them to Others)

1. You have permission to ***be who you are.***
2. You have permission to ***make mistakes.***
3. You have permission to ***ask for what you need.***
4. You have permission to ***say "No".***
5. You have permission to ***think freely*** and ***speak your truth.***
6. You have permission to ***speak the truth to power.***
7. You have permission to ***be great*** and ***powerful.***
8. You have permission to ***laugh*** (*out loud at yourself and at the human condition*).
9. You have permission to ***be happy.***





Our Vision and Purpose

Our Vision: Tipping the world toward love and justice in alignment with God's deepest desire for our lives and all God's creation.

Our Purpose: Watsonville First United Methodist Church invites all to experience the love of God and be on a transformative journey following the Way of Jesus Christ.

*We are put on earth a little space
That we may learn to bear the beams of love.*

~ William Blake

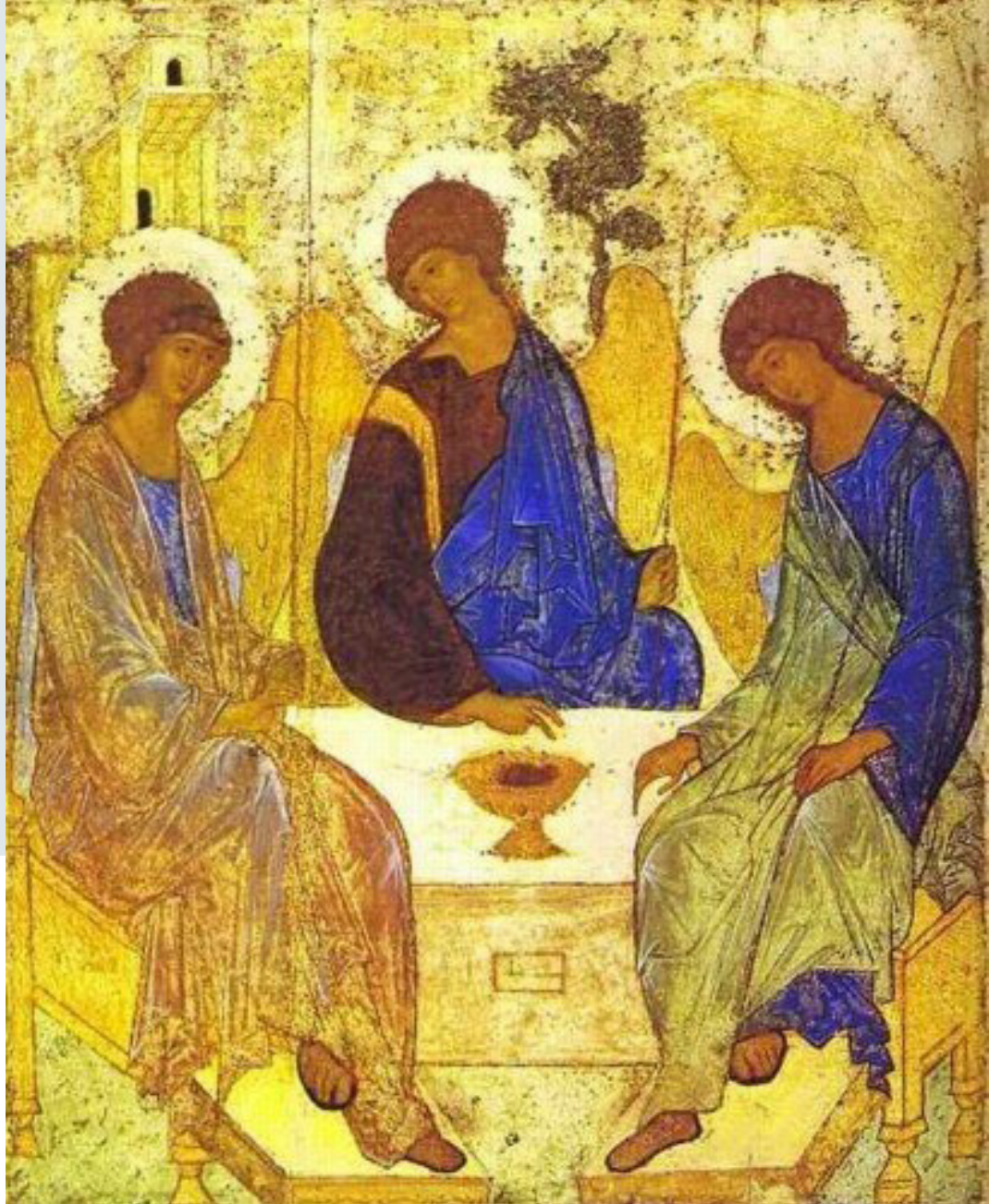
*Someday, we shall harness the energies of love,
and then, for a second time in the history of the world,
we will have discovered fire.*

~ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

The Trinity

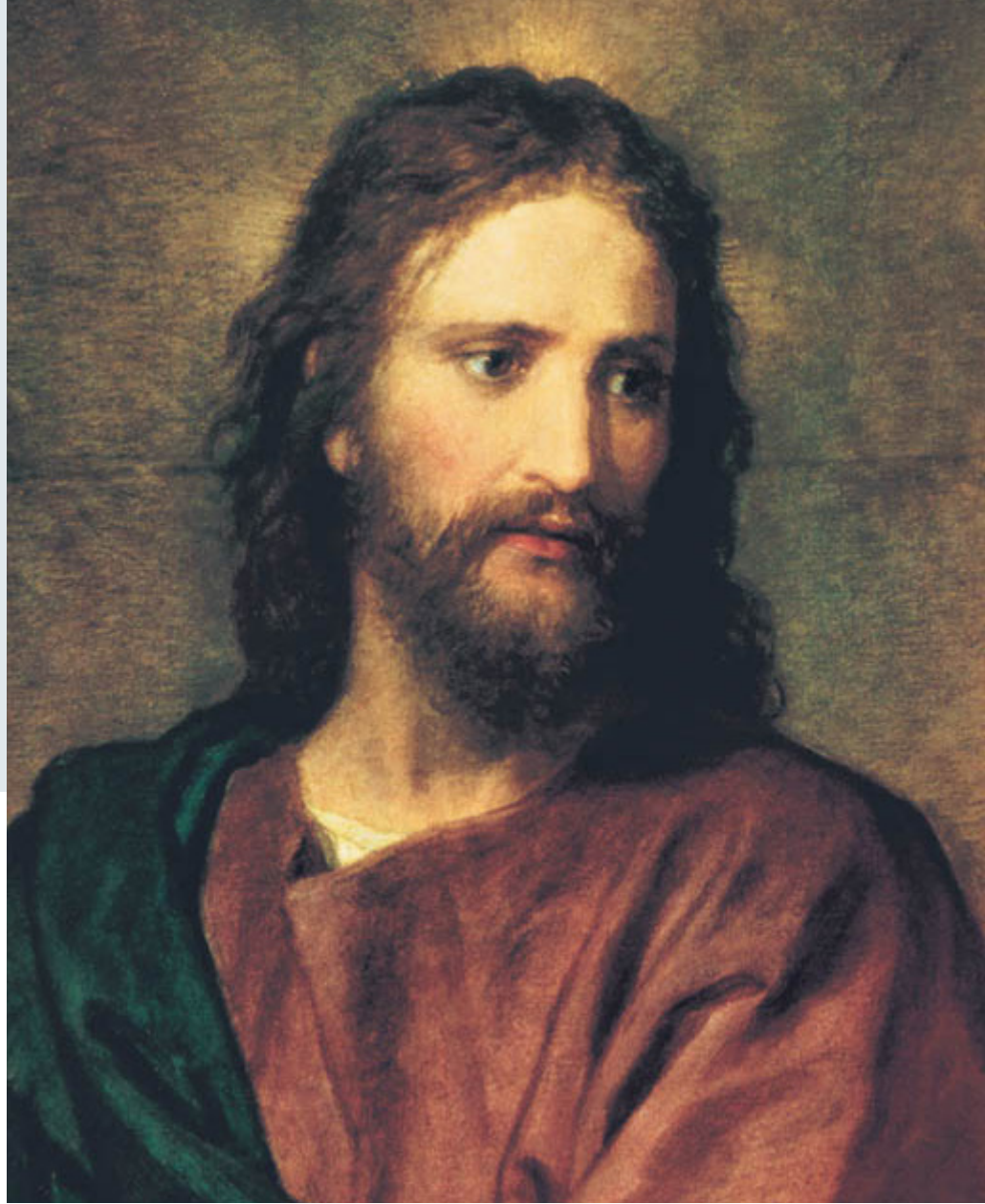
What is unique to Christianity that sets it apart from other religions of the world is the belief in the **Tri-un God** (a.k.a. Trinity): **God**, the Creator; **Jesus Christ**,

the Redeemer; the **Holy Spirit**, the Sustainer and Perfector. It is the theological foundation of Christian faith. Everything is built from this understanding. The Trinity is not three gods, but one God manifested in three coequal and coeternal persons. Therefore, when we say “God,” we mean the Trinity. The three are always working together in harmonious cooperation for there is only one will, one essence, one substance, one God. Christian God does not exist alone but in dynamic relationship with one another through “*kenosis*” (Greek word for “self-emptying” or “outpouring of the self”) where the Father pours himself out in love completely to the Son and the Son in return pours himself out in love completely to the Father. This dynamic flow of divine outpouring of oneself to the other is the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Trinity is constantly working together as in the Greek word “*paraclesis*” which means “the circle of dance” to fulfill their divine intention for creation. This is how God chooses to manifest God-self in the world for the continuing work of Creation, Redemption, and Sanctification.



Jesus Christ

For Christianity, Jesus is the human face of God who turns toward us with truth and compassion. In other words, He is the incarnation of God who became fully human and fully divine through the divine process known in the Greek word “*kenosis*.” *Kenosis* means “self-emptying” (Philippians 2:5-8) when the Father out of love pours himself completely into the Son. Thus, Jesus is the human face of God who made the ineffable and invisible God visible to us in flesh. God became human in order to open the way for humans to become divine. Jesus is the key to our redemption, salvation and deification in and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Second Adam, the New Creation, who redeems and replaces the First Adam who represents the fallenness of humanity.



We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

~ Romans 8:22-23



The Bible

I take the bible seriously therefore I don't read it literally. Reading the bible seriously requires

consulting with multifarious sources: the Holy Spirit, the heart, lived experiences, critical thinking, biblical scholarship, and teachings handed down from faith traditions.

The bible is a compilation of many little books written down from oral traditions and collection of letters beginning from the 1st millennium BC (Old Testaments or the Hebrew Bible) and ending around 120 AD (New Testaments). In the 4th century, a series of Christian councils went through a selection process to finalize which books were legitimate scriptures and which were not. The bible has stayed that way ever since (except for the Protestant removal of the Apocrypha, which Protestants will say should never have been in there to begin with).

I understand the bible was written by humans in their attempt to understand God's actions in their lives specifically and human history generally. I believe most of the writings in the Bible are divinely inspired while some are limited by the cultural and social context of their time. When I read the Bible that begins with the book of *Genesis* and ends with the book of *Revelation*, what I take away is the evolution of people's understanding of God that begins with ancient tribal God and ends with comic, universal God. If you read the bible from this understanding you can appreciate the expansion of human consciousness of God which begins as a god of a family clan who becomes a god of tribes, then to god of a nation, and finally culminates into the God of the universe.

Every Christian interprets scripture. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, said that we bring the faith tradition, our God-given reasoning ability and our personal experience to the reading of scripture. Then we engage with scriptures humbly in community so that we have checks and balances on our personal interpretations. That leads me to the Wesleyan heritage next.

Wesleyan Heritage

John Wesley, 1703-1791



Since the Reformation in the 16th century, much Christian infighting and misunderstanding has occurred over the Catholic and Orthodox emphasis on **Tradition** (which usually got confused with small cultural “traditions”) versus the new Protestant emphasis on **Scripture**. One of the great slogans of the 16th century Reformation against the Roman Catholic church was the Latin phrase *sola scriptura*, meaning the “**Scripture alone**”. It meant the sole authority comes from scripture alone.

This is where John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, comes in. He said wait a minute. To reduce God’s revelation to only scriptures is to deny others gifts that God has endowed humans to use to discern divine truth like intellectual reasoning, human experiences, and faith

traditions. Therefore, he came up with the formula for discerning God’s truth known as the **Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience**. As a result, taking the Bible seriously means it cannot always be taken literally without the engagement of our mind and heart, faith traditions and lived experiences.

Another important contribution that John Wesley made to the Christian faith was the doctrine of grace. He said that God’s grace is operative in a person’s entire life. The work of grace plays out in three stages of a person’s life: **Prevenient Grace, Justifying Grace, and Sanctifying Grace**. I pay special attention to Wesley’s doctrine on *Sanctification and Going on to Perfection*. As Jesus spoke, “*Be perfect (complete), as your Father in heaven is perfect (complete)*.” (Matthew 5:48) St. Paul said, “*...be filled with the very nature of God.*” (Ephesians 3:19b)

Radical Inclusive Love of God

*There is no longer Jew or Greek,
there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male and female;
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

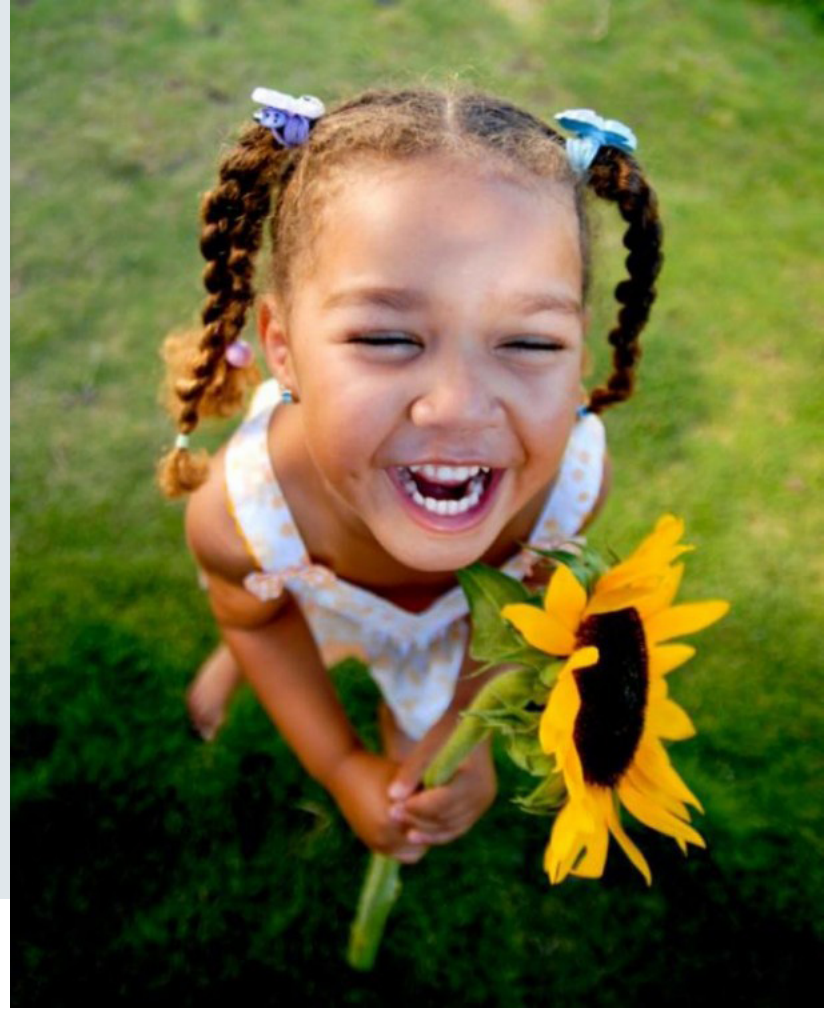
~ Galatians 3:28

*God did not ask you to be Moses or Elijah, Naomi or Ruth.
What God asks of you is to simply be YOU.*

~ Abraham Joshua Heschel

At the core essence of who I am is divine. Paradoxically, the more human I become, the more divine I become. It is for this reason St. Irenaeus, the 2nd century Greek bishop, declared, “**Glorify God is human fully alive.**”

God’s embracing arms are so much wider and radically inclusive than the narrow perimeter that we set for defining who are acceptable and not acceptable to God, who are in and who is out, who are deserving of our love and who are not. Jesus was consistent in his teaching and ministry to break down false barriers that we put up to divide the human community between “us and them”, clean and unclean, acceptable and unacceptable. We, humans, have a propensity to see people who are different from us as the “**other**.” And THAT way of “seeing” leads to a dehumanization process that triggers scapegoating mechanism which has led to a troubling and horrendous outcome in human history. The 20th century American theologian and ethicist,



Reinhold Niebuhr, in his famous book *Moral Man and Immoral Society* wrote, “The chief source of man’s inhumanity to man seems to be the **tribal limits** of his sense of obligation to the other man.” Knowing this, Jesus instructed that God’s greatest commandments are to love God and **“Love thy neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”** (Matthew 22:36-40)

We are created for **love** and **freedom**. God’s love was fully revealed to us in Jesus Christ. The Christ embraces all persons as deserving of love, equal in worth and precious to God, no matter their race, color of their skin, ethnicity, disabilities, sexual orientations and gender identities. We are who God created us to be. In other words, like snowflakes, each of us is a unique, irrepeatable creation of God. Therefore, the uniqueness of personhood should be celebrated, not rejected or shamed. God asks nothing less from each of us than to be unutterably ourselves. It is the obligation of

society to grant its citizens freedom to be themselves and it is the responsibility of every individual to live to the fullest expression of who they are.



*“The living self has one purpose only:
to come into its own fullness of being,
as a tree comes into full blossom,
or a bird into spring beauty,
or a tiger into her power.”*

~ D. H. Lawrence

Express yourself. You only live once.

~ Megan Rapinoe, US Women Soccer star

*“What happened in the life of Christ will happen in us.
In our transformed lives, God lives in us
without us losing our own being.”*

~ Raimon Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*,
Orbis Books 2004



Beloved Community

*For just as the body is one and has many members,
and all the members of the body, though many, are one body in Christ.
For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—
Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—
and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

~ Corinthians 12:12-13

Democracy is like love. It only works when everyone has a voice.

~ Carol Gilligan

*If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.*

~ African Proverb

We are social creatures born to be **relational**. I AM because of WE. That is why the idea of “**separate-self**” is an illusion. My sense of self was forged out of people whom I have had intimate and meaningful relationships with. This is where the “beloved community” becomes a school of love where we learn to love one another in a healthy way.

No person is an island. Even a hermit lives in the context of one’s monastic community and requires visitors. That is why the cruelest punishment is to put a person in an “isolation confinement”. When infants and babies do not receive adequate human touch and interaction, they develop mental illnesses and can literally die. There is a reason for the famous African proverb: “It takes a village to raise a child.” Without others, we will shrivel up, go insane and lose our way. Did you ever wonder why most mass shootings are perpetrated by people who are loners and live in isolation? When we live in isolation we are in danger of being disconnected from reality. Humans function at their best when they interact and live with others in a healthy, vibrant community.



There is a tradition from an African tribe that is apropos here. In their tradition, when a person loses his/her way from the community, the tribe would call for a ritual of forming a circle with the fallen person sitting in the middle. There was once an angry young man who was prone to behave in a way that harmed others. The tribe elder called the tribe to hold a ritual of circle in the village square for the young man. Young man was asked to sit in the middle of the circle surrounded by the people who knew him. Each person in the circle took turn telling the young man what they admired and appreciated about him. It was a way of helping the young man remember all the good qualities and traits that he has forgotten. Through this communal process of affirmations, the young man was rehabilitated and reconnected to the community.

The **church** is an opportunity to form a “**beloved community**” based on Jesus’ instruction, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12) One of human’s deepest longings is a need for **belonging**. The church as a beloved community can be that place of belonging where people can experience love and acceptance, support and safety. As one church woman said, “There are no strangers, only people whom I haven’t met.”

“Each one of us has lived through some devastation, some loneliness, some weather superstorm or spiritual superstorm, when we look at each other we must say, I understand. I understand how you feel because I have been there myself. We must support each other and empathize with each other because each of us is more alike than we are unlike.”

~ Maya Angelou, African-American writer



Nonviolent Communication

I am a practitioner of **Nonviolent Communication** (abbreviated **NVC**, also called **compassionate communication** or **collaborative communication**). NVC is an approach to communication based on principles of nonviolence developed by Marshall Rosenberg. One of the founding principles of *Nonviolent Communication* is that when people don't get their needs met, it leads to violence: violence to oneself (festering resentments that can lead to psychosomatic symptoms and even disorders) and violence to others (often in the hidden form of passive-aggressive behaviors or overt aggression).

For this reason, the greatest contribution an individual can make to the community is taking responsibility for one's needs. If everyone takes responsibility of taking care of one's needs, it increases the feeling of trust and safety in the community. Other people are not mind readers. This will require people learning to set healthy boundaries and communicate their needs. The world is a better place when people can communicate clearly, connect deeply, and interact safely together.

Here are the 9 permissions I give to myself and others:

Nine Permissions

1. You have permission to **speak your truth** and **be who you are**.
2. You have permission to **make mistakes**.
3. You have permission to **ask for what you need**.
4. You have permission to **say "No"**.
5. You have permission to **think freely**.
6. You have permission to **speak the truth to power**.
7. You have permission to **be great** and **powerful**.
8. You have permission to **laugh** (*out loud at yourself and at the human condition*).
9. You have permission to **be happy**.



Sacred Activism

*What does the Lord require of you,
but to do justice,
and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God.*

~ Micah 6:8

Motive is love and instrument is justice.

~ Reinhold Niebuhr

God has created us for **love** and **freedom**. I believe God's deepest desire for us is to live a life of love and freedom. No one wants to be controlled and dominated by others. Human history is a history of struggle for freedom from domination and oppression, whether it be from a person, group, institution, government or nation. Therefore, sacred activism is actively and intentionally participating in God's passionate desire for realizing love and freedom of all people. This sacred work will include advocating for human rights, dismantling the legacy of systemic racism,

gender inequality and economic injustice. There can be no peace without justice. As Abraham Joshua Heschel pointed out, “The road to the sacred leads through the secular.”

In addition, today we are facing an existential threat to the very survival of the human race and animal species from unprecedented acceleration of global warming and climate change. The consequence will be catastrophic. There is an urgency to combat our exploitative relationship with God’s planet to prevent further destruction to our environment. The health of our planet (which I see as the body of God) is inextricably linked with the wellbeing of all life forms, including our own and future generations.



“Love is a terrible thing to ask of us, but it is the only answer. This is the Love we are talking about, not the sentimental love of fairy tales. This is the Love that keeps us up at night, that’s harsh and dreadful and aches inside. The only thing harder than hatred is love. The only thing harder than war is peace. The only thing that takes more work, tears, and sweat than division is reconciliation. But what more beautiful things could we devote our lives to?”

~ Dorothy Day, 20th century social activist and cofounder of Catholic Worker newspaper

The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.



Interfaith Dialogue

*“For what can be known about God is plain to them,
because God has shown it to them.*

*Ever since the creation of the world, God’s eternal power and
divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood
and seen through the things God has made.”*

~ Romans 1:19-20

With the acceleration of technological interconnectivity, our world is becoming a smaller global village and evolving into a planetary community. We are living in a multicultural milieu of diversity in race, ethnicity, and religious backgrounds in our workplaces, schools, neighborhoods, towns and cities. The significant part of the work of Christ was to break down barriers that divide us, increase the bond of common humanity, and to recognize that we are one God’s family. Unless we make an intentional effort to understand each other and learn to love and respect one another, we will wage war against each other and destroy ourselves in the process.

For this reason, I believe in the interfaith dialogue with all the enduring religions of the world for the purpose of promoting greater understanding and respect toward one another’s different faith traditions. Such engagement provides us an opportunity to enrich, expand and deepen our own Christian faith. St. Ephrem of Syria, the 4th century Christian mystic wrote, “God has 1000 names in which none of them are adequate.” As the scripture states, God was present with all people since the beginning of creation. Therefore, I view other world religious traditions as allies and friends of God rather than a threat to our Christian faith. I believe in the Universal Christ portrayed in the prologue of the Gospel of John:

*All things came into being through him (Christ),
and not one thing came into being without him.*

~ John 1:3



Fidelity to Truth & Reality

The truth will set you free.

~ John 8:32

Dedicate your life to truth telling.

~ John Bradshaw

*Proclaim the truth and do not be
silent through fear.*

~ Catherine of Siena



I love the tale of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” by the Danish author, Hans Christian Andersen. The culminating scene in the story occurs when the emperor, naked as a jaybird, parades in the town square strutting pompously pretending to be wearing the finest garment that the world has ever seen. And his entire entourage and the crowd collude in this ridiculous lie. Only a lone boy in the crowd calls out what he sees: **“The emperor has no clothes!”** In that moment when the boy spoke the truth, people gasp in horror because the bubble of lie that they were all living in gets punctured. The genie is out of the bottle and there is no going back.

The Hebrew prophets in the biblical tradition were God’s servants who have put absolute fidelity to God over worldly authorities. As a result, prophets were able to speak the truth to power on behalf of God and the marginalized.

The Truth is like a Styrofoam bobbing on the surface of the ocean. No matter how hard you try to suppress and repress the Styrofoam under water with great effort, it will find a way to rise to the surface. Why do we resist truth? What are we afraid of?

For me, the story of “Original Sin” in Genesis was not the act of eating the forbidden fruit but rather hiding in shame from God in the Garden of Eden. It was not Adam who called out to God,

“Where are you God?” but rather it was God who called out, “Where are you, Adam?” It is an archetypal, primal question that each of us has to answer. Rumi, the 13th-century Persian poet and Sufi mystic, said, “When you show up not being true to yourself, you are harming us and the world.”

In the Jesuit Order, God is understood as the Truth. When we are confronted with truth and reality, it is nothing less than being in the presence of the “burning bush”, the presence of God. There are some things that I am able to do that God is absolutely incapable of doing. God is absolutely incapable of self-deception and misreading reality. I, on the other hand, am always susceptible to self-deception and misreading reality. When we face truth and reality even though they are uncomfortable, painful, and even frightening, they become moments of grace and catalysts for transformation.

The irony is that what we run away from (the truth) is what will make us free. The Gospel tells us that when we are in relationship with Christ, we are in a relationship with the truth. And this truth will dismantle us by dismantling our false narratives that we tell ourselves and live from.

The saving grace is that God, like the title of the poem “The Hound of Heaven” by Francis Thompson, does not leave us to ourselves. A saint’s prayer is “Lord, do not leave me to myself. Save me from myself, I beseech Thee.” The irony is that we humans work very, very hard to evade or run away from the truth that will make us free. Jesus said “So if the Son has set you free, you are *Free Indeed!*”



Speak the truth in love.

~ Ephesians 4:15

No face which we can give to a matter will stead us so well at last as the truth.

This alone wear well... Say what you have to say, not what you ought.

Any truth is better than make-believe.

~ Henry David Thoreau, in the Conclusion of his book, Walden

Template for Transformation

Jesus laid out for us the template for transformation in Mark 8:34-37:

*Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them,
“If any want to become my followers,
let them deny themselves
and take up their cross
and follow me.”*

Deny yourself:

Act of renouncing your false, egoic-centered self and coming into being to your God created “True Self” (indwelling of God in you)

Take up your cross:

Take responsibility for your life instead of evading and blaming. It is the process of Waking Up, Growing Up, and Cleaning Up our lives.

Follow me:

Following the Way of Christ leads to the Cross that crucifies all that are false in me and the life I’m leading. Through participation in the “crucified Christ” we are resurrected into “new being” that embody truth, love and freedom. St. Paul exclaimed, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” (Galatians 2:19-20)

God, take away from me all that will not enter Thy realm.

~ Abraham Joshua Heschel





Calling

*Everyone is called.
Only a few hear that call.
And fewer still respond to that call.*

~ Rabbinic Wisdom Tradition

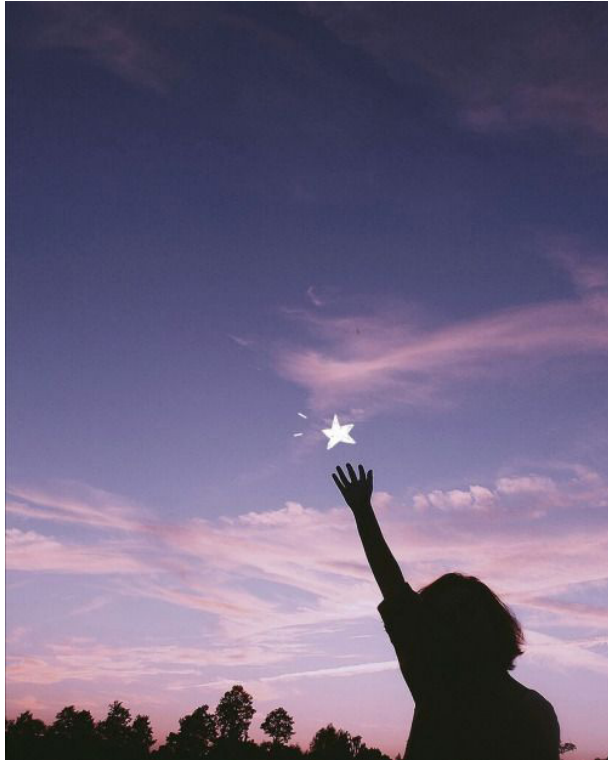
Mark Twain said, “Your two most important days are the day you were born and the day you find out why.”

I would add a third most important day to the list, and that is the day **you take action on your why.**

~ Light Watkins

The 19th century St. Therese of Lisieux of France (also known as “The Little Flower of Jesus”) said, “**Whenever God asks me, I will not say ‘NO’.**” When we don’t live out of our calling we experience dissonance in our souls. The 15th century Spanish mystic, St. Ignatius of Loyola, described the root of human discontent, unfulfillment and dis-ease as “Being out of an alignment with God’s deepest desire for your life.”

I believe life is not a matter of creating a special name for ourselves but responding to God’s call. *Everyone is called.* The purpose of each person’s life is living out one’s unique calling. I ask myself, “Am I living what I am called to live? Am I giving what I was uniquely given to share with the world?” Or as St. Francis said on his deathbed, “I have done what is mine to do; may Christ teach you yours.”



*"We'd never know how high we are,
till we are called to rise;
and then,
if we are true to plan,
our statures touch the sky."*

~ Emily Dickinson

*You did not choose me but I chose you.
And I appointed you to go and bear fruit,
fruit that will last.*

~ John 15:16

Following The Way

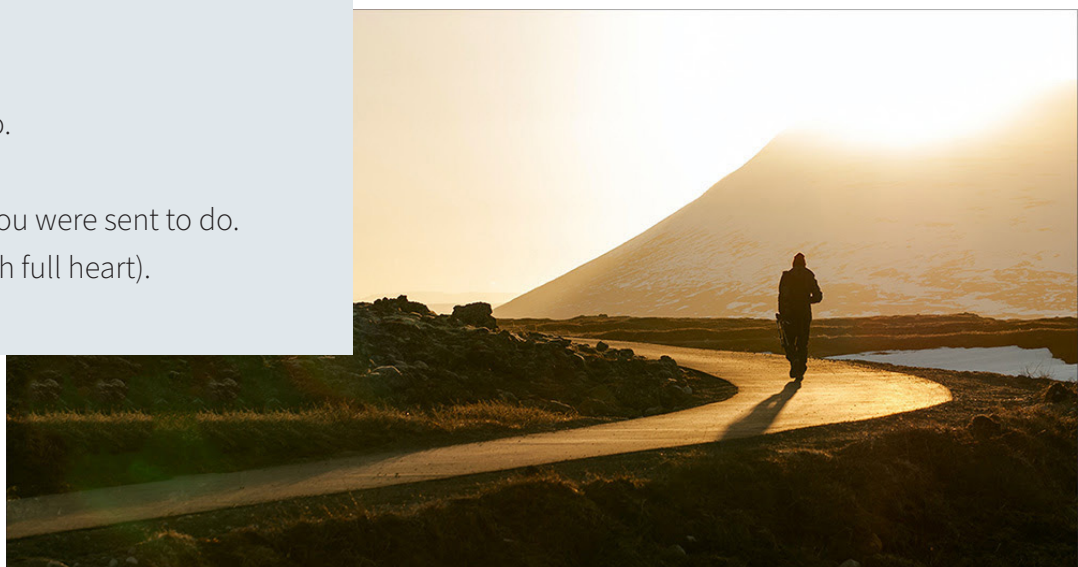
from Sufi Wisdom Tradition

*This is the lesson on following the Way.
How do you follow the Way?*

1. Go where you are sent.
2. Wait till you are shown what to do.
3. Do it with the whole self.
4. Remain till you have done what you were sent to do.
5. Walk away with empty hands (with full heart).

How much will it cost?

The cost is everything, for all you are
and all you have will be asked of you
before the journey runs its course.



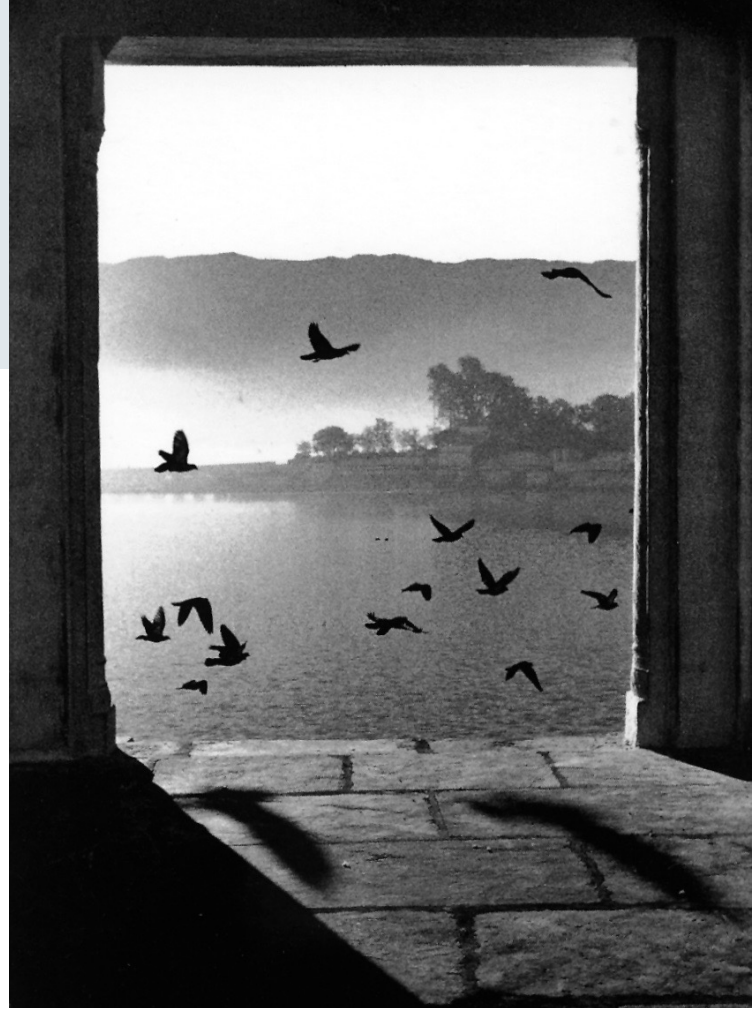
The Goal of Christian Life

*Christianity has not been tried and found wanting;
it has been found difficult and not tried.*

~ Gilbert K. Chesterton

*Enter through the narrow gate;
for the gate is wide and the road is easy
that leads to destruction,
and there are many who take it.
For the gate is narrow and the road is hard
that leads to life,
and there are few who find it.*

~ Matthew 7:13-14



The goal of Christian life is to imitate Christ. Full stop. St. Paul instructed, *“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 2:5) Jesus said, *“The Father and I are One.”* (John 10:30) God is the Voice, we are the echo. Jesus echoed perfectly the Voice of his Father which enables us to echo the Voice of God through imitating Christ. By imitating Christ we align our will with God’s will. Jesus prayed for us, *“As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us... The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one.”* (John 17:22-23) St. Maximus the Confessor, the 7th century Christian monk and theologian in Constantinople, Turkey, wrote, *“Salvation is transformation into Christ.”*

St. Irenaeus, the 2nd century Greek Bishop of Lyon, France, said, *“Christ became what we are so we could become what he is.”* In other words, *“God became human in order that human can become divine.”* This one sentence sums up the entire Eastern Orthodox Mystical Theology. By entering into Union with the Tri-un God and participating in the dynamic life of the Trinity, we are deified. St. Peter entreated, *“become partakers of the divine nature.”* (2 Peter 1:4b) Similarly St. Paul instructed *“...be filled with the very nature of God.”* (Ephesians 3:19b) Our work here on earth, then, is threefold: first, imitate Christ; second, enter into life in communion with the Tri-un God; and third, be co-creators with God by living the life of love and freedom and manifesting God’s divine intention for the world.

Ultimately, my life is not mine but, rather, it belongs to God. This is the deepest realization of spiritual truth: my life is not my life but God's life. Jesus realized this when he faced his own imminent death in his darkest hour as he prayed fervently in the Garden of Gethsemane, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as You will." (Matthew 26:39) As in the prayer of Clemens Maria Hofbauer (1751-1820, Vienna):

*I want what God wants
when He wants it,
as He wants it,
because He wants it.*

It is very liberating when your life is no longer enslaved by your ego projects. Through the surrendered life in God, we are able to live a life of love and freedom. As St. Paul exclaimed, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." (Galatians 2:19-20)



The Grapes of My Body Can Only Become Wine

The grapes of my body can only become wine
After the winemaker tramples me.
I surrender my spirit like grapes to his trampling
So my inmost heart can blaze and dance with joy.
Although the grapes go on weeping blood and sobbing
"I cannot bear any more anguish, any more cruelty"

The trampler stuffs cotton in his ears:
"I am not working in ignorance
You can deny me if you want, you have every excuse,
But it is I who am the Master of this Work.
And when through my Passion you reach Completion,
You will never be done praising my name."

~ Jelaluddin Rumi, a 13th-century Persian poet and Sufi mystic



Benevolent Universe

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,
who have been called according to his purpose.*

~ Romans 8:28

We live in the benevolent universe because our God is benevolent. “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.” (Psalm 103:8) Experience of God is experience of grace. God loves me more than I can ever love myself. God accepts me more than I can ever accept myself. There is nothing I can do to make God love me more or less. God’s love for us is stubborn, relentless, and uncompromising.

God is always conspiring to make us fully ourselves who are created in God’s image. This requires collaborative work between **effort** (my work) and **grace** (God’s work). No matter how much we mess up our lives, God never gives up on us. As Turkish proverb says, “No matter how far you have gone on a wrong road, turn back.” God is like GPS. No matter what wrong turns we make, God is always correcting us to make the right turn that leads us to God which is our salvation. God will always work with us wherever we find ourselves in life. Kabir, a 15th century Indian mystic poet and saint, stated, “Where ever you are is the entry point.”



*Everything will be all right in the end.
If it's not all right, it is not yet the end.*
~ Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ*

Something,
we know not what,
is always and everywhere lovingly at work,
we know not how,
to make us more than we are now
to make the world more than it is yet.

This is the grace
that helps release the abundant love, wisdom, and healing
that are in us all and for which the world is waiting.
Grace, we and the world are, all at once,
One heart, never apart.

~ David Richo

Trust in the Slow Work of God

by Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through
some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances
acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.

Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,

and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

