

THE PATH OF LOVE
[written in oral form]

Our Advent theme is "Freedom Bound", with a sub focus theme for each Sunday. The first was the "Path of Justice". The second Sunday was the "Path of mercy". The "Path of trust" was the third, and for the fourth Sunday of Advent the theme is "The Path of Love."

Freedom bound is a complex / compound journey; it's a choice to break from the chains that are pulling us in a destructive direction. Breaking free includes the various paths we've highlighted each Sunday. To be sure, it **is** a journey, and the freeing path to God --to wholenessto salvation is likely not paved, smooth and wide.

I suppose that is why they call it a path and not a highway.

?What's that AC/DC song.... "Highway to....?"

Well, that's not the road we want to take. Our journey is on a path.

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I thought it would be helpful to review some basic dynamics of going along a path. Our journey actually requires us to progress /to go /to do. Action is required .....*Life is like that.*

So,.....proceeding on a path demands that our eyes are focussed in that direction. That is basic rule number one--focus ahead / look where you want to go. If you don't, you could stumble, or worse.... end up going the wrong way.... and get lost / .....be lost.

Also, you have to go / do it. If you're walking, that means taking steps,.... one after the other in the direction that your eyes are viewing.

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Today's aspect of our desired path is Love. Love, NOT fear, not negativity, Not hate or revenge, but love.

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Some politicians want to lead people down a different path... the path of fear, prejudice and violence, and I won't mention Trump's name.

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A recap: To journey the path of Love focus on Love....**if** your desired destination is to be closer to God. Focus on love instead of other avenues that include fear, despair and hate. Focus on love.

If the world around you looks fearful, threatening and destructive,then you may be on the wrong path.

A reality check is in order.... That's like using a compass.

Therefore, let us be reminded that we live in the Best of times. Humanity is doing better than ever. People are living longer. Almost everywhere, the infant mortality rate is improving. The world is getting safer, there is less crime.

Also, counter to common misconceptions, in the U.S. the murder rate from guns has steadily declined in the past 20 years. Yet, the focus seems to be on a few deranged individuals who claim the language of

violence,.....which too many of us are trying to learn.....because we fear.....and.....that is a different direction from the way to God.

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All is not perfect and wonderful in the world. We must not be naive, yet we need not succumb to fear or violence.

We don't have to go down that path.

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Global warming is a threat, so let us love God's creation. Let us support efforts that nurture healthy choices. Let us focus on healing and restoration, with love imbued hope.

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There are other concerns that can lead us astray, such as the preoccupation with terrorism. Down the path of love we will see opportunities for progressing in love. We can provide **home** for refugees. We can work to take away the terror and fear. We can help those lost in anger and hate to abandon the highway of war, bombing and destruction.

The path of love is full of opportunities for giving.....because that is the nature of love. Love pours out. Love empowers the weak. Love embraces compassionate justice even when such restoration diminishes our own supremacy.

Love is giving,....and.....Love is God's way.

Moreover, with the beckon of mercy and the illumination of trust,....and with love as our focus.....we will always see hope.

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This hope is evident in both of the Old Testament lessons for today.

There are numerous citations, in the Bible, of people looking and heading the wrong way, but these texts point to God as the way to redemption.

The Psalmist cries out to God from the grasp of persecution and despair, "Restore us! Save us!" There are tacit presumptions in this passage, yet the desire is for God's illumination.

They **were** searching in the right direction.

Likewise, Micah is struggling to see clearly. The longing for a strong, redemptive Messiah is evident; nevertheless, Micah is realizing that a just and loving God will bring peace. The Micah text proclaims that the messiah will be "one of peace."

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We are all aware that Biblical prophecies about the coming Messiah were laden with human projections. People were overlaying their own conclusions for salvation/redemption on their constructed image of God's chosen one. In essence, they were building the Messiah in their own minds,.... with their own limited thinking,.....instead of simply trusting God.

We tend to smugly discard their narrow mindedness,.....because we know what kind of Messiah Jesus was. He was not a political ruler or conqueror of armies.

Jesus was a humble follower of God, who exposed injustices, who empowered the weak, who lived and proclaimed love,....who showed us the path to God and our salvation.

Most of those ancient people just didn't understand. They thought God's answer would be a stronger human / the ONE would be superhuman. Of course, we know better.

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Yet, do we not do the same when we seek God for our own deliverance?
Do we not, in our prayers, tell God how to respond?
And, in so doing, are we not limiting our construct of what is divine / what love is all about?
In some ways, I think we have acquired short vision glasses, and our short sightedness is causing us to focus on distractions or landmarks. Too often, we are stumbling in our pursuit to be closer to God.

Secular culture throws distractions at us, and the landmarks are faithful people we put on a pedestal, and they may be inspiring images, but that is all.

So, admire the saints and respect church ministers / leaders as fellow travellers, But please do not make any of them a role model.

Do not place your focus on them. We have but one role model--Jesus, and Jesus always kept pointing to God. And, God is love.

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Mary, in the Luke text, clearly demonstrates that she is seeing down the path of love. Instead of being anxious, overwhelmed and viewing her pregnancy as a burden, Mary is hopeful and overjoyed.

Magnificat is Latin for "my soul magnifies". *What a marvelous word for glimpsing the divine in life.*  
Magnificat is the first word, in Latin, of Mary's song of praise.

This song / this poem confidently describes many of the redeeming ways God engages with humanity. These are better motivators to consider than mere mortals.

For example, it states, God favours the weak, and lifts up the powerless as God brings down the powerful. That's radical.....

Moreover, as we know, these are values and passions that Jesus lived and taught. Jesus is God to us to show us how to live... how to be free.... how to be whole with God and all creation.

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YET,.....there is a twist that stretches our human perception. Call it a lens that helps us to understand love and to better see the divine.

Mary and Elizabeth alluded to it, But it is more obvious in Luke 2, so we will peak ahead to that chapter.

The twist / the added lens is: the Saviour was a baby!

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Our redemption / our journey along the path of love.... begins with a Baby. A baby?

If God can do anything, then God could have launched a full grown, mature Messiah. But, God didn't. Even so, we could skip the birth narratives, and just use Mark and John's gospels to glimpse the "real" saviour of the world in action,.. if that is all there is to it.

Yet, in Luke 2, the angels announced that the saviour is born. They didn't say, "the future saviour"; they said, "The saviour."

A helpless, weak new born Jesus is THE saviour.

Baby Jesus was the saviour, and he didn't have to be crucified to be a saviour.

? A baby is the saviour?

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I think there is meaning and value in this.

This is a lesson in Love,.....and we better understand love--the power of love,.....if we want to progress far down that path.

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When a baby is born, who is the most powerful person in the house?

When Katherine was born she took complete control of our lives, our budget...and the house. She forced us to sell a car. She manipulated our purchases. We spent lots on her.

Yes,.....she had the power, the power to take sleep away from us, and the power to wake me up too early in the morning.

She was so powerful that we had to rearrange our house to make her more comfy, and we had to schedule our lives around her.

Our social life came to an abrupt end, and a diaper bag became a constant accessory. A Baby is Very Powerful.

You smile.....because you know I'm right!

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Now,.....recall the reason for all that power.

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The reason a baby is so powerful is because she or he owns your heart. It is Affective Power. It is love.

A baby is powerful because of love.

Love transforms. Love gives..... and.....with that lens **can** we now see what's going on with this baby saviour thing?

We are invited to see down the path of love.....

We are given a glimpse of the divine before us.....

Love melts away selfishness, greed and arrogance.

Love dispels fear and anger.

Love dissolves the need for restitution, punishment and revenge.

Love creates..... Love does art.

Love builds hope....

Love is compassionate.

Love is giving and transformative.

Love IS powerful,.....more powerful than bombs and guns, that love is for Everyone. Everyone!

So when you hear, "we must fight terrorism with violence/ we must kill terrorists,..... and when you hear, "you better own a gun or punish the bad guys", and when you hear, "watch out for the Muslims",... then KNOW those are cries from lost souls going the wrong way.

OUR path includes a baby saviour. Our salvation journey is love, and nothing... **Nothing at all can overcome love.**