

CROSSWAYS

"Making Christ Visible in His Community."

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QUESTIONS OF FAITH

Who is it that you seek?

How then shall we live?

How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

As many of you know, I was introduced to these three questions during my sabbatical at the Northumbrian Community. These were formative questions for the community. They were the means by which they stayed focused on their purpose as a people. At the time, I was skeptical of how these questions might be applicable for the Holy Cross community. It seemed that we had those questions covered in the ministries in which we were participating. Now, six years later, I have a much deeper respect and understanding of those questions. They are hauntingly accusatory. As I look at by-laws and diocesan structures and committee meetings, I begin to wonder which of these activities and structures are really helping us answer these three important questions.

Who is it that you seek?

I would like to think the short answer is simply, "We seek the Lord, Jesus Christ." However, I am now aware that we also have to ask which Jesus Christ do we seek? Do we seek Jesus the superhero who is going to come and pull us out of danger when things go awry? Do we seek Jesus the untouchable holy one who is an impossible example of holiness? Do we seek Jesus who will support and defend our particular political agenda? Or do we seek the Jesus of scripture who was constantly shocking both friends and opponents with his radical restructuring of priorities? This last Jesus is the dangerous one. This Jesus can be inconvenient and even a bit unnerving. This is the Jesus who said, "Do not look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Do not fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life –to God! –is vigorous and requires total attention." (Jesus, recorded in Matthew 7:13-14, *The Message*)

We seek the Lord Jesus Christ, the Christ who calls us out of ourselves and into a world that desperately needs God's help and care. We seek the Christ who has the power to change our hearts through repentance and prayer. We seek the Christ who can break down our walls of self-absorption and pride. We seek the

Christ who can transform us into the very best people we can be, who can match our talents with the needs of the world, who can send us out to "do the work [God] has given us to do". We seek the Lord Jesus Christ, the transforming power of love. Our first three

items in our Rule of Life focus on this work of us Christ-followers: Pray Daily, Worship Weekly, Read the Bible. We seek Christ in prayer, worship and scripture.

"How then shall we live?"

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to be disciples, Christ-followers, who live our lives based on the call of God. We study the life of Jesus and learn about his compassion, forgiveness and grace, and we try to form our lives in a similar way. The divine spark that dwelt in Jesus dwells in us as well. The divine love of Christ is within us. Our calling is to release that divine love in our lives.

Of course, it is all too easy for the urgent matters of life to get in the way of love. How often do we find ourselves saying, "I'm too busy for that"? Loving takes time and effort. Jesus had a great capacity for living in the moment and not being bound by anxiety over an uncertain future or regret over past perceived failures. Can we live life one day at a time? Christ-followers do just that. We live one day at a time and do our best to encounter each person we interact with as a unique individual loved by God, and thus, loved by us. A life lived as a Christ-follower requires the willingness to forgive and to ask for forgiveness; it requires patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control. The good news is that these are gifts of the Holy Spirit and are available to all Christ-followers. (Galatians 5:22-23) Living a life in Christ is a calling to love and leads to a life full of life. As Jesus promised, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

"How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

The short answer is - together. We live in a world that is, at best, apathetic about church; at its worst, skeptical of and even hostile to church. Our culture and the media have depicted the Christian church and thus, the Christian faith, as bigoted, short-sighted, hypocritical and self-focused. The rise of the "nones" (those who answer "none of the above" when asked about church affiliation) gives us a clear snapshot of how the negative perception of the Christian community has affected our youth and young adults.

We Christians do now live in a "strange land." We now have an entire generation of folks who have been raised with little or no connection to faith and the stories of scripture. Thus, the stories of faith are not familiar to many of the younger generation. This means that the stories of faith can be heard as fresh examples of God at work in the world, and we have an opportunity to share the story of faith to those who have no preconceived notions of scripture and God. This is lived out through our last three items of our Rule of Life: Serve Others, Share Your Story, Give Freely.

As Christ-followers who gather together on a regular basis to support one another and to grow in grace and faith, we build a sacred partnership. A sacred partnership implies that we depend on one another, we support one another and we believe that together we can accomplish God's dream for the world. ("Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.")

A sacred partnership means that we are not alone in our call to be God's ambassadors in the world. We have a safe place where we can share our victories and our failures as Christ-followers in the world. This is a place where we are accepted even though we know that we have much to learn and far to grow in Christ Jesus. This is a place where we seek to know and polish our God-given talents that we might be able to go forth into the world to serve in the name of Christ. This is a place where we learn to pray, to worship, to love, to give and to serve. And this is the place where we find partners for ministry. Together we are prepared for service and sent out to love and serve in Jesus' name.

Who is it that you seek? How then shall we live? How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? Asking these questions of ourselves and of our community will lead to building a deeper relationship with Christ, with one another and with those we serve.

Mike+

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*I came that they may
have life and have it
abundantly.*

John 10:10



Comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

2 Corinthians 1:4

REFLECTIONS ON FAITH AND LIFE

THE REVEREND LINDA GOSNELL,
ASSISTANT RECTOR FOR PASTORAL CARE

PRACTICING THE FAITH – FOCUSING ON ONE WORD

Have you ever been to the Y or to a gym in January? They are strangely, or perhaps not so strangely, busy this month. At this time of year people traditionally make New Year's Resolutions and often the lists begin with improved eating habits and increased exercise. These resolutions may last a few months, however they infrequently become new habits with lasting effect. Rather than making a long list of New Year's resolutions this year, consider adopting one word to focus on for the year. I can almost hear the questions: What? One word? How can that be helpful?

Words are powerful. Consider this: In Genesis, God spoke the world into being, and according to the gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people." The Word – creative, powerful, transformative.

Our words, too, are important – words we think, words we say, words we read, words we sing, words we hear. Words matter. Br. Kevin Hackett, SSJE, has written, "Words matter. There is a theological reason for this: words, our capacity for language and speech, are one of the chief ways we reflect what it means to be created in the image of God ..."

A few years ago I found a website, <http://myoneword.org/>, created by Mike Ashcraft and Rachel Olsen, who encourage others to join them in choosing one word for the year on which to focus. This chosen word is to be one that represents what each person most hopes God will do in or through them that year. Many who have participated report transformative experiences. Ashcroft and Olsen offer these guidelines:

- 1st – Determine the kind of person you want to be at the end of the year. Take some time to think about this, considering the condition of your heart, the gifts of the Spirit you've been given, the person God has created you to be.
- 2nd – Once you have that image in mind, identify the major characteristics or qualities of this person you wish to be.
- 3rd – Choose your word, ONE word, that will help you move in that direction. While there may be a dozen things you would like to work on, commit to only one.

Once you've chosen your One Word, focus on it throughout the year. Explore its general meaning and its specific meaning for you. Pray your word. Ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance as you explore its relevance to you. Begin each day asking how you might incorporate this one word into your thoughts and activities of the day. Journal about your experience of it. Activities such as these will help you identify changes in attitude or behavior you may need to make to become more of the person you want to be.

Discuss your one word and your actions in relation to it with your close friends, your life group, your spiritual director. Talking about your word throughout the year with others will make it possible for them to help you see changes in yourself, and they can help you remain accountable to your one word commitment.

Remember that this is a process. Though you may not see any change right away, you can have confidence that God is working in your life. If you focus on your one word throughout the year, you can trust that you are moving in the direction that you want to go to become more of who God intends you to be.

Need help choosing your word for 2016? Here are a few suggestions to get you started thinking:

Abundance
Able
Carefree
Celebrate
Compassion
Confidence
Consistent
Creative
Dependable

Faithful
Forgive/Forgiven
Fruitful
Generous
Grateful
Health
Hopeful
Humble
Intentional

Joyful
Listen
Love
Presence
Purpose
Relationship
Serenity
Transformation
Wisdom

Other suggestions and possibilities can be found at <http://myoneword.org/word/>.

If you decide to focus on One Word for 2016, let me know. Blessings for a holy, happy New Year!

Linda+

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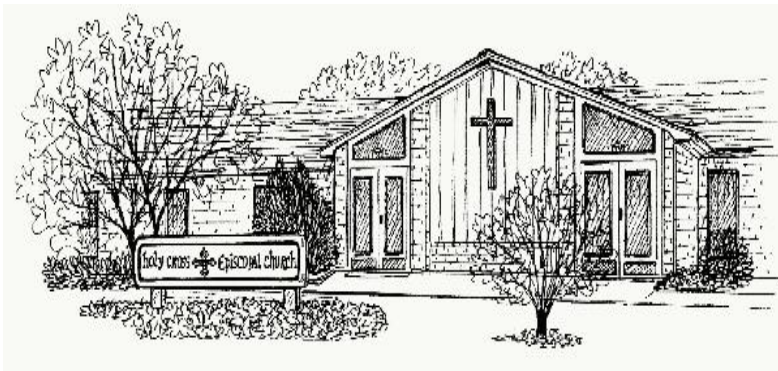
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FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

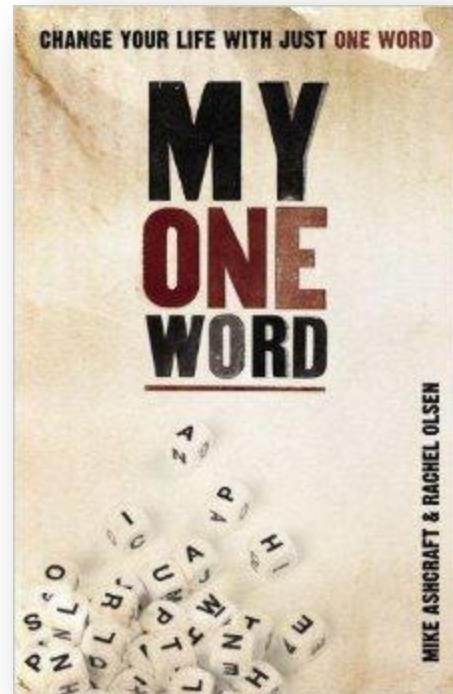
My One Word

by Michael Ashcraft & Rachel Olsen

The concept of *My One Word* is simple. Lose the long list of resolutions — all your sweeping promises to change — and do something about one thing this year instead of nothing about everything. Choose just one word that represents what you most hope God will do in you, and focus on it for an entire year. This single act will force clarity and concentrate your efforts. As you focus on your word over an extended period of time, you position yourself for God to form your character at a deep, sustainable level. Growth and change will result.

~ www.amazon.com

Send an email to kclconnor@gmail.com if you have a book, music, or movie that has been a special part of your spiritual journey.



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