

Fourteenth Weekend after Pentecost (RCL/A): "The Way"
Matthew 16:21-28
August 29-30, 2026
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

As many of you know, there is a GPS app called Waze. It shows the user the **way** to go.

The earliest name for Christianity was the **Way**. The idea is that Jesus not only **shows** us the **way** to go, but He **is** the **Way**. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus tells the disciples the night before He dies that He is going to prepare a place for them, and then He adds:

*"... you know the **way** to the place where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the **way**?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the **way** and the truth and the life...." (John 14)*

There's a classic icon, a sacred picture, of the Virgin Mary gazing at the beholder, the person viewing the art. She is tenderly holding the Christ Child in her arms and pointing to Him. The icon is called the Hodigitria, meaning "She who guides," or "She who points the Way." Like John the Baptist who pointed at Jesus and proclaimed, "*Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29), Mary points away from herself and toward the Savior, wordlessly saying, "**Here** is the Way. He **is** the Way."

In today's Gospel Jesus lays out the road less traveled that He's going to take, describing it to His disciples (including us) as the **way** of the cross:

"If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."
(Matt. 16:24b)

That's Jesus' response to Peter trying to shush Him when He makes the first Passion prediction, revealing He's headed to Jerusalem to suffer and die, then be raised again. Peter makes it clear he wants his messiah to **conquer**, not **be** conquered. Peter was so upset by the mention of suffering and death, he probably didn't even **hear** the part about resurrection on the third day. Jesus is quick to reorient Peter to the kind of Messiah He is: a Suffering Servant, not a military leader. When Peter had time later to reflect rather than react, he'd certainly realized that all along the war Jesus was waging wasn't against the Romans but against Satan, sin, disease, and death.

2,000 years ago Jesus' spiritual GPS was leading Him to Jerusalem and to Calvary. **Some** of you have literally walked the way of the cross, the Via Dolorosa, the Sorrowful Way, through the streets of Old Jerusalem, from the Lion's Gate near the Antonia Fortress to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. But our Savior calls **all** of us, **every** Christian, to walk the way of the cross in our own lives, wherever we live, whatever we do, in every circumstance.

Jesus tells us to deny ourselves and take up our cross, *"For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."* (Matt. 16:25) When I was little, I went to a parochial school and heard **lots** of stories about Christian martyrs who literally lost their lives due to their faith, so I always associated this verse with martyrdom. But I've come to see that "losing" one's life for Jesus' sake doesn't often or necessarily mean making the **ultimate** sacrifice, **dying** for Christ. It can also mean **living** for Christ, as our Lord commands, loving God above all else and our neighbor as ourselves.

I recently read how a stretch of Pineapple Street in Brooklyn Heights has been renamed Dorothy Day Way. Dorothy Day didn't die for the faith, but she definitely lived for Jesus. She so devoted her life to the poor, worked so fervently and spoke out so passionately for social justice, that she's a candidate for canonization, a nominee for sainthood, in the Roman Catholic Church. She doesn't fit the traditional mold. She was born in 1897. In an early autobiography she acknowledged becoming pregnant as a young woman, fearing her partner would abandon her if he knew, and consequently terminating the pregnancy. She's been described as "A Complicated Saint for Complicated Times."¹ It's been written:

Day's life defies easy categorization. She was a journalist close to Communist and Socialist circles in New York, who chronicled the struggles of workers. She later converted to Catholicism and challenged the church to live up to its teachings and was a life-long pacifist who opposed war in all forms... Through the Catholic Worker Movement, founded in 1933... Day established houses of hospitality that continue to serve the poor today all over the U.S.²

Day opted for voluntary poverty in solidarity with the poor. Beyond her personal experiences of suffering, **the burdens of the poor** were the cross she took up as she followed Jesus. Day didn't share

the suffering of the poor in silence. She exerted her power as a citizen and as an educated woman of faith, she used her voice to speak out for the voiceless, including and especially the immigrant community, heavily represented in the working class neighborhoods in which she lived and worked. Her views were quite unpopular with those who opposed labor organization efforts and whose pockets were lined by the under-compensated labor of the poor. Her anti-war and anti-nuclear rhetoric was excoriated by those who disagreed. One priest who serves at a church near Dorothy Day Way, said, "I've always liked Dorothy Day because she's someone you can't put in a box. If you say, 'Was she liberal?' You could say yes. 'Was she conservative?' Yes. Because she was ultimately on fire with the Gospel."³ How wonderful that this woman who might be canonized once said, "Don't call me a saint. I don't want to be dismissed that easily."

We talked at Bible study about what it looks like for **us** to deny ourselves and take up our cross. It was quickly pointed out that this is something parents are called to do every day. Nurturing the lives of our children often means putting their needs before our own, denying ourselves and our desires in small and large ways, out of love, for their sakes. Parenting is a holy vocation. So is being a life partner. Holy vocations include being a teacher, a health care or mental health professional. Falling under the umbrella of holy vocations are financial advisor, tax accountant, cashier, chemist, engineer, Uber driver, serving or bussing tables in a restaurant, owning a business, delivering produce to a supermarket, making sandwiches at a deli, working at the genius desk at the Apple Store, writing articles or books, selling books, being an auto mechanic, working in law enforcement or the military, at the DMV or as a telemarketer, working in a daycare or at a preschool, going to school, being retired, serving in an assisted living facility or as a home health aide or live-in caregiver, community organizer, politician or lobbyist. **Every job under the sun is a holy vocation** if while we're doing it we're loving God above all else and our neighbors as ourselves.

A religious studies prof at Manhattan University said, “Having a street where it’s Dorothy Day Way, I think the ‘Way’ is kind of fun, because it shows that her life was also a pilgrimage, but it invites us to think about what is our way, how do we follow Jesus in this world of madness, of war, of suffering.”⁴ This weekend’s lesson from Romans 12 is a great description of how we follow Jesus in this time and every time, what the holy “road less traveled” looks like. Here it is from *The Message*:

9-10 Love from the center of who you are; don’t fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.

11-13 Don’t burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don’t quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.

14-16 Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they’re happy; share tears when they’re down. Get along with each other; don’t be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don’t be the great somebody.

17-19 Don’t hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you’ve got it in you, get along with everybody. Don’t insist on getting even; that’s not for you to do. “I’ll do the judging,” says God. “I’ll take care of it.”

20-21 Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he’s thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don’t let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.

That is what it is to walk the way of the cross, to follow, live, and love like our Jesus. Amen.

¹Anna Laughery, “A Complicated Saint for Complicated Times” (*The Young Catholic Woman*, April 18), on-line.

²Camillo Barone, “Brooklyn Street renamed for Dorothy Day, honoring sainthood candidate” (*National Catholic Reporter*, May 22-June 4, 2026), p. 5.

³Op. cit.

⁴Op. cit.

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham