



November 9th, 2023  
Ordinary Time

Dear Friends,

We are picking up on the question we left unanswered yesterday — “Why is taking on the Rule of Life our encouragement to those sensing an invitation to move deeper?”

Maybe another way of phrasing this question is, "why does it matter?" There are a few reasons, but here is where we will start. Because that desire to move deeper into life with God speaks to a deeper desire for a way of life lived with a particular people. This desire is part of what it means to bear God's image. Your desire echoes God's desire being bodied forth in the Trinity's creation and sustaining of the Beloved Community, the Church. The Church exists because God desires friendship and union with us and desires that we know that friendship with one another. God's desire for us is the heart of Jesus' prayer in John 17: "...protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one."

And so, how can we commit ourselves to one another? How can we plant our feet firmly in a community, roll up our sleeves, and live together in the way of Jesus? Our best guess is that if we want to live a particular kind of life – and if we're going to do it together, then we need to create a relational way for all of us to affirm and encourage our shared commitments to the sort of life we sense God calling us toward. In older Christian communities (particularly among the monastic communities), community members would first be initiated into the community via baptism and then would subscribe to a rule of life. The Rule of St. Benedict made this practice most famous around 529 A.D. This next part goes without saying, but let's say it anyway. All Souls is not a monastery or a convent, but we think there is something to this idea of a community committing themselves to a particular way of living (together) in a place.

If you want to commit to this community, then it means following a path (and any meaningful relationship takes a little time, right?) that leads to taking on a shared rule of life. This path begins with receiving the Kingdom of God by embracing Jesus' life and story as your own - and receiving baptism, the initial rite of passage into union with Jesus and Jesus' Church. If you have already placed your faith in Jesus for forgiveness and life and been baptized (no matter the mode or the order), we welcome you. If you need to discuss your faith story or be baptized, we are happy to walk with you on that journey, no matter how long it takes.

Once you are ready to dive more fully into our community, you will take on All Souls' rule of life encompassing both personal questions of obedience to Jesus (particularly naming Jesus as Lord over our money, our sexuality, and our power – the three realms Christians have long identified as prime places of temptation ) and communal questions (around our core hopes of hospitality, restoration and shalom). At the core of these questions, we are asking you to commit to

1. continually surrender your life to Jesus' authority
2. seek to live in community with Jesus' friends intentionally
3. allow God to speak into your life
4. give yourself away for the good of your neighbors

The above brings us to our next question: What if this sounds heavy, and I'm not sure I can add a single more thing "to do"?

That is okay. Maybe you don't need to take on this rule or wait another time. Or maybe dig into why it feels burdensome – and talk it out with someone else to see if there couldn't be a way that this might be freeing and rich for you. If this whole thing strikes you as just more work or some added moralistic duty to add to your already overtaxed life, then don't do it. That's not the spirit or intention, and we applaud you for refusing to load yourself up with guilt or life-draining duty.

In all this, we've struggled with the tension – having this process seem burdensome or impossibly complex or (in reaction) acting as though joining a community that seeks to follow Jesus really doesn't ask much of us. We think the Gospel calls us out of ourselves and past our comfort zones. At the same time, God invites us to the "unforced rhythms of grace."

And to be as transparent as we can, you do not need to take on this Rule of Life to be part of All Souls. If you want to be a part, you are a part. Our shared rule of life is for those who feel called to take a deeper level of commitment to our shared hopes and to put these hopes into concrete practice alongside others in our community.

Tomorrow, we will look to the hopes planted in our Rule of Life.

Peace to you this Thursday,



Rev. Bliss Spillar  
Senior Pastor