

## THE WAY OF LOVE



John 14:3 "Thomas said to (Jesus), "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

The Most Reverend Michael B. Curry is the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. He is now probably better known as the preacher from the Royal Wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in England in 2018. Bishop Curry is using that notoriety to promote his understanding of the Gospel, which in his words is the "Way of Love." Bishop Curry believes that Jesus of Nazareth sought in his day to inspire a religious movement or revival, rather than to establish a church. Later the Greeks would make Jesus' teaching more of a philosophy, and even later the Romans would make it more of an institution. But what we now call Christianity began in

ancient Palestine as simply a reform movement with Judaism, inspired by the life of Jesus --- by his words and by his deeds.

Those early followers of Jesus sought to continue the example of their Lord, to continue to do what he had done and what he had previously authorized them to do, to heal the sick, to forgive the penitent, to care for the poor, to feed the hungry, to tend to the marginalized --- to the widows and orphans of his day, who might well be the immigrants and refugees of ours. This Jesus Movement was at first simply "The Way" in the earliest Christian Scriptures. It was a new way of living, and soon Gentiles as well as Jews began to join the Movement as it spread across the Roman Empire. Bishop Curry calls this the Jesus Movement, and he sees the Episcopal Church simply as a branch of the Jesus Movement. St. Paul, in prison chains in Ephesians, begs the followers of Jesus to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Bishop Curry insists that we as contemporary followers of Jesus are called to walk in "the Way of Love."

So how do we do that? What exactly are we seeking to do in our lives as Christians? Are we just looking for a ticket to heaven? Or some magical cure for all our ills? Or perhaps some spiritual insurance, just in case? No, no, we are called to so

much more than that. Bishop Curry argues that we Christians first seek Love; to know God's love, to love and be loved by others, and to love ourselves. Secondly, we seek Freedom; freedom from sin, freedom from fear, oppression, and division that pulls us away from living as God created us to be, dignified, whole, and free. Thirdly we seek the Abundant Life that Jesus promised for us here and now, one overflowing with joy, peace, generosity, and delight. Next we seek a Life of Meaning; a life of giving back to God in thanksgiving, and one lived for others. Finally we seek Jesus; to follow in his footsteps in the Way that has the power to transform our lives and change the world!

So how exactly do we do all that is the question? In former times, Christians established what they called "A Rule of Life" to guide them along the Way, a broad set of practices that have proven to further our growth in this Way of Love. In my last Fireside Chat, I talked about the 5 parts of my 'rule of life' that has guided me over the last 40 years. Bishop Curry's suggests a slightly different rule, just seven simple practices, noting that all the practices are important and all of them are essential to a healthy Christian life, and Bishop Curry has a single word to name each of these practices. For example, Turn, Turn, like the ancient Latin word for conversion, of turning our lives around, by pausing, listening, and choosing to follow in the Way of Jesus. It is a choice we make to walk in the Way of Love, or not. It is a

series of choices necessary to reorient our lives, not to the ways of the world, but to the ways of God.

Another of his practices is to Learn; to reflect upon the Scriptures, daily, especially upon Jesus' life and teachings, in order to understand God's story in the past, so that we can clearly see God's activity in the present, in our community and in our everyday lives.

A third practice recommended by Bishop Curry is to Pray; to spend some time each day, dwelling intentionally with the Maker and Creator of us all! Offering up our thanksgivings for the lives we have, offering up our concerns for the sick and suffering, offering our hopes and aspirations, pausing to acknowledge God's presence in the world and in our lives today.

A fourth practice is Worship, to gather in community weekly to thank, praise, and dwell with God together, even if we can only do so virtually, to keep the Sabbath Day holy, to support one another in fellowship and common prayer, to comfort one another, to encourage each of us along the Way.

A fifth practice is to Bless, to live a life of thanksgiving for the blessings which we all have received, to be a thankful people, because we are blessed, because we are a people who then practice generosity and compassion for others, including inviting others to join us along the Way.

A sixth practice is to Go, to intentionally go across the boundaries that separate us, to break down the walls that divide us, so that together we can truly become the Beloved Community, as St. John called the early followers of Jesus, where there is no distinction between Jew or Gentile, free or slave, male or female, black or brown or white, where we are all one Body reconciled in love with God and with each another.

A seventh practice is to Rest. From the beginning of Creation, God has established the sacred pattern of going and returning, of labor and rest. Especially today, God invites us to dedicate a portion of our time to restoration and wholeness, within our bodies, minds and spirits, and within our communities and institutions, to put down our electronic devices and look up to God, the primary actor who holds all things together and makes us well, so that we don't burn out along our journey.

These are Bishop's Curry suggestions. They are broad and simple. They are easily open to adaptation to the differences in our lives and cultures. Bishop Curry has created a series of videos as one among many "Way of Love" resources available from the Episcopal Church for congregations, for youth groups, and for individuals who are interested in engaging more deeply with this Rule of Life. There is, of course, no one way, or perfect way, to follow Jesus, but all of us should be engaged in some way in that struggle to follow Jesus. Each of us needs these kind of practices

in order to be healthy, in order to be well-rounded, loving followers of Jesus. I commend them to your consideration, refectio*n*, and prayer. Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, and Rest. That in the end, we all may indeed lead lives worthy of the calling to which we have each been called, and follow Jesus in the Way of Love and Life. Amen.