



THE *Episcopal* CHURCH



# THE WAY OF LOVE

with Bishop Michael Curry

## Season 2, Episode 1: Introducing *The Way of Love beyond the church walls*

**Bishop Michael Curry:** This is Bishop Michael Curry and you're listening to *The Way of Love*.

[music]

**Sandy Milien:** Welcome to season two of *The Way of Love*, a podcast from The Episcopal Church about following Jesus and changing the world. I'm Sandy Milien and I'm here with Kyle Oliver.

**Kylie Oliver:** Hey, Sandy, it is good to be back. This is the first new, full episode we've made since the show launched. We wanted to take the opportunity to say a big thank you to everyone who checked out season one, maybe rated and reviewed us on Apple Podcasts, maybe shared the show with friends. However you've been engaging with us, we really, really appreciate your support and your feedback. We're excited about season two.

**Sandy:** Absolutely. In this episode, we're going to introduce the theme of season two, which is "The way of love beyond the church walls." We'll say more about what we mean by that after we let Bishop Curry and his guest set the scene for us.

**Bishop Curry:** Hello, it is a privilege and a joy to be with Bishop Vashti McKenzie, the first elected, ordained, and consecrated woman bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. A former colleague when we served together in Baltimore.

**Bishop Vashti McKenzie:** That is right.

**Bishop Curry:** Well, thank you for being with us.

**Bishop McKenzie:** Well, thank you. I thank you for the invitation. It's been a great experience. I thank you.

**Bishop Curry:** Bishop Vashti was speaking to the House of Bishops and one of the powerful moments really came when you said, "Sometimes—" I don't want to put words in your mouth, but, "Sometimes we have substituted the Church for Jesus Christ." What does that mean? How do we overcome that?

**Bishop McKenzie:** What I found in my life was that I had a great relationship with church, I grew up in the church, I was a church child. Whenever the door was open, I was there. I participated in all of the ministries, Sunday school, summertime activities, I was just there. Loved singing in the choir, loved the holy hush, loved the drama, loved everything that was about the church, but realized that's what my relationship was with. My relationship was with the church, was with the culture, it was with the structure, it was with the process. That's where my relationship was with, but that is not a relationship that's going to keep you in a lifetime.

People disappoint, structures disappoint, the service didn't flow the way you wanted to, the preacher didn't preach what you wanted to preach, choir didn't preach what you wanted them to preach, but if my relationship is with Jesus Christ, then my focus is there. The Lord saved me, the church is where I live out my salvation. The church doesn't save me, the building doesn't save me. We say all the time when Jesus comes back, he's not coming back for a structure, he's coming back for me.

My relationship must be with Jesus Christ. Then the structure, the church, is where I exercise my ministries, where I come in, and I'm refueled, I'm refueled in worship. Then I must take everything that I have gotten on the inside and take it on the outside so that others can hear and know and then come to know Christ themselves.

**Bishop Curry:** How can I do that if I don't know how? How can I do that, bishop? Help me.

**Bishop McKenzie:** Well, I always go back, Jesus is our role model. How did Jesus do this? Jesus met people where they were. He talked to them about what they needed, and then led them to where he wanted them to go. He meets the woman at the well, and he doesn't talk to her about going to catechism class, he doesn't talk about "you really need to be in Bible study and I missed you in Sunday school class." He began to talk to her about water. This is water, she understood water, she was coming for water. Then, he led her from water to living water, to her dropping her pots and going back and starting a revival in the city of Sychar. Come see a man who told me everything about myself.

If we meet people where they are, we want people to come into the church all dressed and ready and pressed, all disciples, no problems. Everything is cool, hunky-dory, but we have to meet them where they are. Where they are is not in church. They're on the street corner, they're in the Twitter-verse, they are at work, they're in different places, just like Jesus was in different places. He preached in a boat, on the mountainside, on the plain. We have to go to those places and meet people where they are.

A hungry person can't hear about the love of Jesus until you demonstrate that love of Jesus to them. When you demonstrate the love of Jesus to a hungry person, give them your sandwich! Give them your sandwich, provide an opportunity for them to receive nourishment. Then, you can talk to them about the reason why I do this, I do this is because the Lord loves me and out of this love, I want your needs to be met. Once you meet people's needs, then they're ready to hear all the other stuff.

**Bishop Curry:** What I hear you saying is what a friend of mine said years ago: in this day and time, we as church can't wait for the congregation to come to us. We must go where the congregation is.

**Bishop McKenzie:** Absolutely.

**Kyle:** How could these ideas be good news for your life? Has a disappointment with institutions held you back from deepening your relationship with God?

[music]

**Kyle:** Well, we're back, and I want to take this opportunity to set up season two for us a little bit. The folks who we work with for The Episcopal Church on putting the show together were really interested in having season two be a deep dive into how the Way of Love practices can support us as we live into this very reality that Bishop Curry and Bishop McKenzie are describing in this conversation. With that in mind, Sandy, you're a young church leader, I'm a young church leader, slightly older, but in the scheme of the average age of people in churches, we're both quite young. What is that like for you to be someone who's really engaged with their faith in a time when lots of people our age aren't?

**Sandy:** Well, in my context, I am a priest kid. Since I can remember, I've been very involved with my faith. That has created some preconceived notions of who I am, my identity. It's intimidating to say or to be friends with, "She's so religious. I can't do anything wrong around her", type of thing. I realized that as I grow up, and as I build more relationships with friends and others, and live in this world today, all I can do is be me, be Sandy and not lose my identity.

I think the Way of Love beyond the church walls, as a young person in the world today, especially, is just accepting others and creating an environment that it's all about love, acceptance, and mutual respect. Hopefully, people would see Jesus reflected in my words and actions and I will do the same. As we say in our evangelism ideals, it's inviting them to more and expecting that when we invite them to more, to whatever that is, they would see Jesus in me.

**Kyle:** Maybe the more, maybe inviting them to more is partly about inviting them to reconsider who they assumed you were as a priest's kid, or as a Christian or whatever. That as those relationships deepen, they understand, "This thing that means so much to Sandy is different from maybe what I was expecting."

**Sandy:** And I think it has happened. As I think of my close relationships, people accept me for who I am. It's because I've made my faith, my job, my leadership, a priority in my life. Once I do that, once I give it the importance and the respect it deserves and the meaning has, to me, I think others see that too.

**Kyle:** It makes sense. I've been thinking about this some in the context of just in the last year have moved from New York City to San Francisco. I was surprised. I didn't think of New York City as a particularly religious place, but in moving to California, I have realized that-- I'd say there's a strong difference in the culture here between the idea of having an active spiritual life and the idea of going to church or participating in a formal religious community. My wife works at Grace Cathedral, where they host a yoga event inside the cathedral. It's a huge space. They're 600 people doing yoga there.

It's incredible. A minister from the church always gives a little introduction. The person who leads the yoga class, I honestly don't even know what his religious affiliation might be, but he's obviously someone who's on a significant spiritual journey, and he's given a lot of thought to his spiritual life. I just really appreciate about the space that all these folks create, the notion that we're here, we're obviously, in a big church. There's obviously somebody over there in a collar and I certainly know what that means.

They're saying something about why their faith relates to what we're about to do and they're not afraid to say that that comes from the teachings of Jesus or this comes from a scriptural value or this comes from a Christian religious tradition or whatever. They're obviously interested in welcoming me wherever I'm at, and trusting that this will be meaningful to me, that I have something to contribute here as well. I'm excited by the

prospect, I'm about 10 years older than you, I think Sandy, something like that. People my age and a little older, I think we're a little more likely to have grown up in a situation where they had church baggage.

It seems to me that the more younger people I meet, what often was baggage and I know, there's the plenty of people who grow up with baggage. There's also people just who don't have a lot of baggage and are genuinely curious. That is such a wonderful opportunity, I think.

**Sandy:** I think society believes that the younger generation needs a church with loud music and all these extravagant things. I don't think that's what we want, speaking in general for the younger generation.

**Kyle:** Make sure you represent everyone.

**Sandy:** I think what we want and I think what we need is just authenticity. All we need is for people to welcome us, as we are. Celebrate that we want to be part of a community, whatever that community might look like.

**Kyle:** I think the discipline then for us, and for our show in season two, is to stand between these two worlds. Stand between the world of traditional faith practices, and to have a curious outlook on what does that mean today in various contexts and beyond maybe what we're used to. In the same way that we called up Katie and had a conversation with her about her non-traditional practice of prayer, we're going to, this time around, continue to talk to Bishop Curry about the Way of Love and continue to talk to others who are putting it into practice in new ways where they live.

**Sandy:** That's right. We also want to hear from you, our listeners, so we invite you to continue to reach out. Share your stories with us and how you practice the Way of Love in your daily lives.

**Kyle:** This episode was produced by Sandy Milien and me, Kyle Oliver, and I handled the editing as well. Our theme and reflection music is by Ana Hernández. Jerusalem Greer writes our reflection guides. Chris Sikkema writes our show notes and our website is by Kaleb Heitzmann. You can read it at [wayoflove.episcopalchurch.org](http://wayoflove.episcopalchurch.org).

**Sandy:** You can subscribe to the show wherever you get your podcasts. We'd love it if you'd rate and review it or share with a friend. If you'd like to contribute music, a prayer or feedback, write us at [wayoflove@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:wayoflove@episcopalchurch.org).

**Day Smith Pritchett:** This is Day Smith Pritchett from Durham, North Carolina. Gracious and loving God, we thank you for stirring us up in these days, for calling and inspiring us to love you and our neighbor with all that we are. May we so follow the Way of Love that we will see you in everyone we meet. May we so carry your blessing that those who know us, know you. We ask this in the name of Jesus, through whom you have given us everything we need. Amen.

**Bishop Curry:** The way of Jesus is the Way of Love and the Way of Love can change the world.