



THE *Episcopal* CHURCH 

# THE WAY OF LOVE

with Bishop Michael Curry

## Season 2, Episode 8: Resting in and with the Land

**Bishop Michael Curry:** This is Bishop Michael Curry, and you're listening to *The Way of Love*. In this episode we're talking about the practice we call "Rest" – receive the gift of God's grace, peace, and restoration.

[music]

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

**Kyle Oliver:** Thanks Sandy. This final episode of season two is about a special take on the practice Rest. Our guest in the second half of the show is Nurya Love Parish, co-founder and executive director of Plainsong Farm and Ministry in Rockford, Michigan.

**Sandy:** First we have a conversation about the connections between the spiritual practice of Rest and our responsibilities to care for God's creation. Let's go to Bishop Curry and his guest.

**Bishop Curry:** Lynnaia Main, tell us who you are and what you do for a living.

**Lynnaia Main:** My name is Lynnaia Main, and I work on your staff as The Episcopal Church's representative to the United Nations.

**Bishop Curry:** Now I suspect a lot of Episcopalians probably don't know that the Episcopal Church is actually involved in the United Nations. Tell us a little bit about that.

**Lynnaia:** We go way back to the very beginning of the United Nations. The Conference of San Francisco where the United Nations Charter was signed included an opportunity to go to Grace Cathedral. If you go to Grace Cathedral, you can see the mural of the original meeting that founded the United Nations. We have many Episcopalians who have been at the United Nations. One of them we know about is Eleanor Roosevelt, for example, who we honor in our holy books, and who was one of the founders and chairs and drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. So, we have been there since the beginning.

**Bishop Curry:** I know one of the real concerns that gets addressed at the United Nations is around the whole question of climate change and the environment. Tell us a little bit about that.

**Lynnaia:** Climate change is something that we have picked up more recently, and there are a couple of reasons. One of them is the Paris Agreement. Bishop Marc Andrus in the Diocese of California has been very instrumental and visionary in bringing us to the United Nations for that work. The goal is to keep us within a threshold of two degrees above preindustrial levels in terms of global warming. Up to about two or three years ago, security issues, international development, human rights, really dominated the agenda at the United Nations.

Getting about, say, two or three years ago, I started to notice that at the absolutely highest levels, including the UN Secretary-General, we were beginning to hear more and more that no issue is more important than climate change. Why? Because if we don't get this right, we won't have a planet. We're literally hearing that. With that shooting to the top position of the UN agenda, and looking at the scientific data and projections of what can happen if we don't address this immediately and urgently, it meant naturally that we needed to rethink our own agenda as The Episcopal Church engaging with the UN.

**Bishop Curry:** I see. It's easy to think of climate change as a wholly secular and scientific endeavor—to be sure, it obviously is that we got to save the planet if we want to live. We're all in this together, like it or not. There is obviously the scientific concerns. That's what tells us what's going on, but there's another way to look at this in there. I've heard you talk about Sabbath. What's Sabbath got to do with environment? I thought Sabbath was just doing nothing.

[laughter]

**Lynnaia:** Sounds pretty good.

**Bishop Curry:** That's not bad either. That's a good thing.

**Lynnaia:** The way that we're going to address climate change, there's several different ways that I'm sure are familiar to most of us, mitigation, adaptation. We need to reduce our carbon output, our carbon footprints. There are a number of different ways in which this can be done. Some of them have to do with policy. Some of them have to do with shifting patterns of industrial production. Some of them have to do with individual choices about what we do. Sometimes we think, "I'm going to have to give up meat." That's one of my struggles. "I'm going to have to give up flying around the world."

Nobody likes the thought of giving things up. It gives you the idea of a scarcity, austerity, recession, fasting. It doesn't sound like much fun. There's another way of looking at it. Many of us feel stressed because we're doing so much. We're seeing so much. We're going here and there. We're overloaded. We're stressed. If we are reducing our consumption and our production, we're also reducing to some extent our level of going here and there, of doing this and that, and it gives us time to rest. In fact, in reducing our consumption, we're finding we have more time.

**Bishop Curry:** Dr. King once said, and this is going back to the early '60s, he said, "It's really amazing to me that we have labor-saving devices that don't seem to actually save labor."

[laughter]

**Bishop Curry:** It may be more complicated and increase the stress and the work.

**Lynnaia:** That's right.

**Bishop Curry:** So that the Sabbath rest...

**Lynnaia:** There's a gift there.

**Bishop Curry:** There's a gift there.

**Lynnaia:** In the same way that when we fast, we're drawing in closer to God by giving something up. So, yes, it involves some hardship, but at the same time, realizing our dependency on whatever it is that we feel is so important, that we're missing it when we give it up. That dependency calls us to mind that we really depend on God.

**Bishop Curry:** So that the notion of Sabbath is actually Sabbath is simple. It's actually simple living.

**Lynnaia:** Yes, and part of the design, part of God's design. As we know in the Bible, the references to how the land itself needs a day of rest, that the crops cannot continue to be produced, that we need a year for land to be fallow, for example, that whole concept of a seventh day. If we look at our need to reduce our consumption in those ways, it doesn't feel so much as what we're missing out or what we're losing, but rather what we're gaining.

**Bishop Curry:** The simple living is actually closer to the divine design, which is closer to who we really are and meant to be, and the closer you get to that is the key to real happiness.

**Kyle:** Think about a time in your life when letting something go felt like a gift rather than a loss. What are some ways you can find new life in God's call to live simply?

[music]

We're back, and now we're going to go a little deeper into these connections by speaking with someone who's ministry practice is very connected to the land and to Sabbath. Here's Sandy.

**Sandy:** For today's episode we welcome our guest Nurya Love Parish. Welcome to the Way of Love, Nurya. Can you begin by introducing yourself and where you're from?

**Nurya Love Parish:** I'm Nurya Love Parish. I am from greater Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**Kyle:** Well, it's good to have you with us Nurya. You're a priest and you started a farm. We better start with the story of how that happened.

**Nurya:** I was originally born and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada. As a child in Las Vegas, I started to have questions about how human beings lived in relationship with the rest of nature. I wasn't a Christian. I actually have no religious background, but I had a lot of questions. I had bigger questions than I was, questions about why was there grass in my front yard in the midst of desert, when I was still a pretty young person.

I trace the beginning of Plainsong Farm back to those big questions about how do human beings live on the earth, and how can we live in our places in a way that gives honor to the ecology and the human stories that have preceded us and that we need to find our way through. The farm is really a place where we explore those questions. We seek to reveal the connectedness between Christianity and the care of creation.

I started a farm because I think only on a farm was it going to be possible to wrestle with those big questions about how human beings relate to the rest of creation, and how can healing happen for us and for the planet we live on. When you get to the farm, it just looks like a farm. The fields for vegetables are to your left. This year, we didn't have livestock, but when we had livestock last year, the chickens are in front of you and the pigs were to the back. When you dig a little bit deeper you notice that we're doing things like holding worship on Sunday evenings and calling it Sabbath at the Farm and gathering outside to pray.

When you dig a little bit deeper, you notice the young adult fellows that are there on the farm with us this season have a rhythm of life that begins with morning prayer and continues with fieldwork and continues with study and individualized projects and is inspired by the Rule of St. Benedict. When you first get there, it just looks like a farm.

**Sandy:** I'm interested to hear more about the Sabbath at the Farm. What spiritual needs does an offering like that meet for the people who participate?

**Nurya:** I'm a priest of The Episcopal Church. 10:00 AM on Sunday morning, I do, straight up, Book of Common Prayer worship. 4:30 on Sunday evening, I do all-ages activity-centered prayer and scripture reflection. We start with The Gathering song. It's a song that my co-founders, Mike and Bethany Edwardson, wrote. It's short and simple and gets us into a space that we recognize as sacred space, even though we're outside in a circle next to a really old barn. It could be a picnic, but over our heads is a big old tree and under our feet is grass and earth.

That's the setting where we always then explore a piece of scripture. Usually, we explore it in two ways. We have an all-ages activity, something that anyone can find a connection to the Scripture reading through, and a really short teaching and some kind of questions for reflection that we then talk about in the circle. Then we pray. We pray the prayers that are on people's hearts. We pray the prayer of Jesus, the Lord's Prayer, and then we transition to a potluck meal.

It has surprised me the hunger for worship outdoors, even though nature for us is right next to a house. It's right next to a barn. It isn't wilderness, but it's outside and it's peaceful. I often feel as somebody who is used to leading worship in a lot of contexts. I feel like at the farm, the space does the work of putting people in a reverent place, in a way that I can't even explain.

**Sandy:** We often think of resting as an individual practice. I wonder how that experience of resting has been in a community?

**Nurya:** That's a great question, especially because the people that I rest with at Sabbath at the Farm are the same people that I work with during the week. We began it because we needed it, starting a new organization, starting a new ministry, starting a new farm. We realized after year one when we had just done work, that if we didn't come together in worship and in rest, we might not sustain. We also realized that there were people who wanted to connect with this ministry through exploring what would worship look like on a farm. We wanted to make a space for that, but really, we began it because we felt like it was essential for us.

**Kyle:** Is there's something that this ministry and this site is teaching you about rest?

**Nurya:** When I think about the biblical narrative and Sabbath, the first story that comes to mind is the first story in the Bible, which I was taught in seminary, the seven days of creation, it's not a literal scientific explanation for how the world came to be, it's a story of meaning and metaphor that has as its summit, the Sabbath experience, and that it was so essential that it was woven into the very beginnings of all life on Earth. That life on Earth was not possible without the incorporation of Sabbath rest.

Moving past that Genesis story into the Sabbath commandments from the Hebrew Scriptures, it is fascinating that there are two different versions of those, what we colloquially call the 10 Commandments. So two different times, the Sabbath is pointed out, and there's two different reasons given in the Bible for why the Sabbath matters. One of them is the one that we read

in Exodus, which is that story I already referenced, the Genesis story. God made the world in six days, he rested on the seventh day, you are also to rest.

Then in the Deuteronomy version of the same 10 Commandments, the reason is different. In Deuteronomy, the reason that you have to observe the Sabbath is you have to remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out of slavery into freedom and commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. So the idea-- and I am not good at this, but the idea is that you aren't slaves to any human being, including your own self and your own to-do list and your own monumental mountain that you may be trying to climb.

The Sabbath commandment reminds me that God does not measure my worth by my accomplishments. If God did, God would have me going seven days, and that's slavery in Egypt. That's not servanthood with God. You are a child of God, and God loves you and God wants what is best for you and what is best for you is to have regular rhythms of rest.

[music]

**Sandy:** Well, that wraps it up for another season of *The Way of Love* podcast, and we really hope you join us in early 2020 for season three. This season will be all about what it's like to live this rule of life in small groups and community settings.

**Kyle:** Until then, please continue telling people about your favorite episodes of the show. Please be sure to check back every other week or so for more bonus episodes between seasons, and if you'll be at the Rooted in Jesus conference January 21st to the 24th in Atlanta, stay tuned for an announcement about a special live episode we'll be recording at that event.

**Sandy:** This episode was produced by Kyle Oliver and me, Sandy Milien, and was edited by Kyle. Our theme and reflection music are by Ana Hernández. Jerusalem Greer writes our reflection guides. Chris Sikkema writes our show notes. Our website is by Kaleb Heitzman at [wayoflove.episcopalchurch.org](http://wayoflove.episcopalchurch.org). Learn more about Plainsong Farm at [plainsongfarm.com](http://plainsongfarm.com).

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

**Susan Hahn:** This is Susan Hahn from Alexandria, Virginia. Almighty God, whose loving hand has given us all that we possess, grant us grace, that we may honor you with our substance, and, remembering the account which we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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