



THE *Episcopal* CHURCH 

THE WAY OF LOVE

with Bishop Michael Curry

Season 1, Episode 3: Rest – At peace with the one who made you

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]

Kyle Oliver: Welcome back to *The Way of Love*, a podcast from The Episcopal Church about following Jesus and changing the world. I'm Kyle Oliver, and I'm here with Sandy Milien. Sandy, what have we got in store for this episode?

Sandy Milien: Well, in case you don't have them memorized yet, there are seven Way of Love practices. They are turn, learn, pray, worship, bless, go, and rest. Today, we're going to talk about that last one, rest. I think that practice is one I really like, because it's one that I personally often don't give it the importance it deserves, but it is so important, taking time to just be.

Kyle: This really feels like a practice that could be one of the things that our faith traditions really have to offer the world right now. Everybody is so busy. Everyone has a million things going on. The truth is that probably all these practices, people who we really respect and admire struggle with us. I'm reminded of when we were first starting to talk about creating this show, I was asking the people who developed this vision for the Way of Love, I was asking them, "Okay, well, how did this come about? What do I need to know?"

They told me the story of the group putting this together, they lock themselves in the room for like a really intensive weekend. They had a bunch of Bibles and a bunch of people who think a lot about the Christian life, and about teaching and learning, and about what it means to follow Jesus. They kind of hashed it out.

It was this, like, marathon work session, and they produced this document and they were really proud of it. They brought it to Bishop Curry and said, “Okay, here we go. Here’s the first draft of the vision for the Way of Love.” They gave it to him and he looked at it. He said, “Well, this looks good. I like these practices, but you forgot rest.”

Sandy: [laughs] No.

Kyle: Several of these people are friends of mine. I just thought like, “Yes, that tracks.” I’m sure I would have forgotten it too.

Sandy: Well, I’m glad it resonated as one of the practices. I hope they themselves had some time to rest after all that work. Let’s get now to Bishop Curry and listen to what he had to say when we asked him to unpack the meaning of rest in the Christian life.

Bishop Curry: Part of that word “rest” comes from or is related to the word Sabbath, which obviously is found in Genesis 1, in that first story of Creation, but it’s also found as a principle in the Book of Hebrews in the New Testament, that the Sabbath rest was not so much a day off or a time to go to sleep, although that may be part of it, the Sabbath rest, to enter into God’s eternal Sabbath rest, as it says in Hebrews, is to actually dwell in God, is to abide in God.

When Jesus in John’s Gospel says, “Abide in me as I abide in you,” he’s talking about, “Dwell in me. Allow me to dwell in you.” That is the rest. It is to be at peace. It is to be one with God. That is truly to rest.

It is almost to be in complete harmony, in the depth of relationship. It’s almost to be like, and this is probably a silly example, but if you can think of a time when you’ve ever like really been ga-ga-goo-goo in love with somebody, and you spend time with them and you talk, whether it’s on the phone or in person, have you ever noticed how you had no consciousness of the time? That is to dwell deeply with that person. To enter into God’s Sabbath, God’s Sabbath rest is to dwell so deeply that you forget about time.

Kyle: So, to step out of time, almost.

Bishop Curry: Because you do. You really do. That’s why at the end of Genesis, the poetry of the Creation, God saw all that God had made and said it is very good. The high point of that Creation was, “And God rested on the seventh day.” It wasn’t that God took a nap after seven days of hard work, is that God was whole and at peace with himself with what he had made.

Kyle: So it’s a combination and a celebration.

Bishop Curry: Yes. It is. Actually, I think this is consistent with the biblical thing. There’s a sense in which when you become who and what you are supposed to be, what you were made for and how you’re living your life, when they become one, there’s no room for anxiety because there’s no need for it, you’re being who you are. You don’t have to act. You don’t have to work. I like to say, people who act and do it well, we give them Academy Awards because it’s hard work to act.

It’s not hard work be who you really are and to be one with God, to be at peace with the one who made you. To be that is to be at perfect rest, perfect peace, perfect stillness. That’s the best sleep you can ever get.

Kyle: Yes. Amen. Take a minute to reflect on a time when you felt this sense of peace and harmony. Did that experience reveal something about who God is calling you to be?

[music]

To get practical on that, how do you think we set up the practices and habits that can make that possible? That's a beautiful vision, and I'm thinking, "I can think of some times in my life where that happened." How do we sort of set ourselves up to experience that on a regular basis?

Bishop Curry: That is where you do have to adopt a routine of practices that put you in the space where that can happen. I've been ordained, it's what, 37 or 38 years now, and as a parish priest, I can think of all the times when instead of letting Sunday be a day of rest, if you will, for people when they come to church, I put them to work and made them work harder in church, which actually defeats the whole purpose in a funny kind of way.

What's going on there, at least in worshiping on a Sabbath, is a practice and a regular routine of that practice. That puts you in the space, in the context, where the rest is possible. It's not that the practice itself is rest.

Kyle: It's like a frame.

Bishop Curry: It's like a frame. It really is. When I was the rector at St. James Church in Baltimore, we lived in the rectory there. The rectory was actually located not near the church, which was inner city Baltimore, the rectory was actually in a neighborhood that was north of the church, that was in an Orthodox Jewish neighborhood, which was fascinating.

I had never lived in an Orthodox neighborhood before. Whenever the Sabbath happened, everything in the neighborhood changed. You didn't hear cars. You didn't hear honking of horns. Nothing mechanical happened. Every once in a while, on a Friday night when the Sabbath had begun, we would hear a knock on the door, and that meant one of our neighbors had left something electrical on and they needed somebody, a local Gentile, to come turn it off. Our daughter used to go and do that. It was like there was a stillness that came over.

It was a blessing to live there, because a stillness came over the whole neighborhood. You just saw people walking in the street, you didn't hear cars going by. You didn't hear the noise, the normal noise of the city. It was as though the practices that they engaged in actually created the space for people to enter into that Sabbath rest. That's the genius. It's not that the practices themselves are the rest, it's that the practices help to put us in the place or the context where the rest can happen.

Kyle: It's making me think of, the Society of St. John the Evangelist has this coffee mug, I forget exactly what the mug says on it, but it says, "Put away your crossword. Drink a cup of coffee and be with Jesus." It's like the pouring of the coffee, the sitting down, taking that first sip, it helps to create the space.

Bishop Curry: Yes. You actually do see, it's funny you say that, you reminded me, you do see a little bit of it. I know this is going to sound strange, but Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, he's about to get killed, he's about to get in trouble, so it's kind of a tense situation, but notice what he does. Instead of staying in the whirlwind of the events of the chaos – there's chaos going on, Judas has gone out, he's selling them out, and Peter is freaking out and all that kind of stuff and the rest of them were like running – instead of Jesus getting in the swirl, he goes off into a garden.

Notice the behavior. Goes off to the garden, a quiet place, then he engages in a practice, prayer, and he struggles. He finds himself getting into the swirl of it. If you read in the Gospels, I think it's in Matthew's version where he says, he's like praying over this, "Let this cup pass from me," and all that. He's in the swirl of it. Then at some point, he just says, "This is not about me. Not what I want, but whatever God's dream requires," and it's like it's still, and then everything else that happens, happens. You don't see him hollering and screaming. It's really not the most edifying picture of Jesus, "Okay. Please, please don't take me, don't take me." I mean, it's not the most edifying picture.

Kyle: Relatable though. [laughs]

Bishop Curry: It's relatable. It's real. He goes off, not peacefully but peaceably, and faces what he has to face. It was entering into the practice where he could rest with himself and all that kind of stuff, but where that rest became possible, which was a kind of peace that helped him walk.

Kyle: If I'm hearing you right, a practice of rest is about helping to build the container. Maybe that's lighting a candle, maybe that's the bedtime ritual, maybe that's putting your cell phone away, but resting or a practice of rest is about creating the container that lets you be with God in a fulfilling way.

Bishop Curry: Yes. When that becomes part of your routine – I mean, I know routine can get routinized. I know that. But when it's part of your routine, it becomes part of the energy of your life. Any routine when you take, how it is when you stop something that's part of your routine, you're thrown off-kilter. When that rest, that container for that rest is part of the routine of your life, the rhythm of your life, that's a better word, then your life partially gets lived according to that rhythm and not the rhythm of life itself.

That's the genius of Sabbath. There is a point you've just got to stop and let the rest happen.

Kyle: Amen to that. Thank you.

Bishop Curry: Thank you.

Kyle: That is really helpful.

Bishop Curry: Man, thank you.

[music]

Kyle: We're back. There were all of those great examples in the interview about these different framing practices for rest, like not the thing that is resting but the thing that like helps you get in that headspace. We talked about, maybe it's pouring a cup of coffee, maybe it's the full-fledged Orthodox Jewish practice of really doing no work and letting the hush descend over your neighborhood. Whatever it is, we're talking about that tricky thing of like, what do you do to put yourself in the place to receive this gift?

I'm wondering, what practices of rest have worked for you or have you found helpful, Sandy?

Sandy: Even though I'm guilty of neglecting and not giving rest the importance it deserves, some of the practices that I try to do in my daily life that put me in a space or a context where rest is possible include, journaling before bed to put my mind at ease, or reading articles or books on topics that I'm really passionate about.

One practice that I just recently realized that is resting is our Milien 5 Family Time on Sunday afternoons. They're in this special time we, the five of us as a family, try to be present and intentionally listen to each other. We share about our week, express, or more like vent, about things that might be weighing on us, and even have difficult conversations.

What I love the most about that time and that space is that we learn from each other, we support each other, and we help each other grow, not only as individuals, but also as a family. This has honestly become my favorite time of the week.

Kyle: That's really cool. How did that start? Like what's the origin story of the Milien-5? Did I get that right, Milien-5?

Sandy: Yes. That is correct, yes.

[laughter]

Kyle: I love that.

Sandy: Yes. My sister came up with that name. I'm the youngest of three. My older sister decided that my parents worked too hard and too much and we don't necessarily give time to each other to spend and just talk, and sit and rest, so she decided that we were going to have mandatory family time once a week.

At the beginning, I wasn't really happy about it because it was mandatory on Sunday afternoons, you're tired, you're like, I just want to be alone and just be in my room or whatever. Then it became a constant thing and I started liking it, and now I crave it. Every Sunday after church, we're like, "Oh, no, no, we can't go out with our friends or we can't have any other plans because we have family time." It's something that we have learned to love. I can speak for my family and know that they love that time.

What's even more interesting is that we take it to the next level and we take three or four days during the year to go away from our house and spend a longer time, and have a family retreat where we go in-depth about our year and what we hope for about each other and the new things that we expect or are planning. It's been really good. I love it.

Kyle: That's really beautiful. It's maybe a good segue. I really appreciate something Bishop Curry said, which is this idea about rest doesn't just mean not working and it doesn't mean going to sleep necessarily, but it's about this opportunity to receive. It's not like your family gets together in the same room and then just sits there, right? Like there's an active participation but it fulfills this role of a sort of gracious open space to just be.

Sandy: Right.

Kyle: It reminds me a little bit of the thing that first occurred to me, which is that I really like – and I can't do this every week, I wish I could, maybe I should – but I really like to go to art museums. For me, there's something about the fact that like all I have to do is enjoy it.

I remember I went one time to the Chicago Institute of Art with a mentor of mine and he's like, "Okay, I'm going to take you on the quick tour of the things I like." We just went and saw a few things. It just opened up this whole new way of experiencing a museum for me, because I tend to be a little bit anal and wanting to like see everything and read every placard. It was so cool to just be with him and just be like, "Yes, I'm going to look at this for a few minutes and then I'm going to go look at that." It's just totally like, "Here's a few things."

That has become really meaningful. I like that there's this part where I'm moving my body. It's an active experience. It's not like I go to a movie and just sit there, but it's also an experience where there's nothing, like, expected of me. I don't have to do anything. Like, there's no pressure to have an epiphany or reach some kind of grand conclusion about this piece of art.

Sandy: Or write a research paper or something.

Kyle: Yes, yes, exactly. All the stuff that like I'm constantly having to like make stuff, and do stuff and check boxes, and there's like none of that, it's just like follow where the spirit leads and take my time. That's been an important rest practice for me. As I learn the museums of my new city, I'm really looking forward to getting to rest in that way a little bit more often.

Sandy: Yes. That sounds wonderful.

[music]

Well, that's a wrap for this episode on rest. Thank you all for joining us today. This show is produced and edited by Kyle Oliver with assistance from me, Sandy Milien. Special thanks to Ana Hernandez for providing our theme music. Check out her website at anahernandez.org.

Kyle: Our reflection music this week was Dragon Country (Apple & Clove) by Axeltree, published under a Creative Commons Attribution License at freemusicarchive.org. You can subscribe to the show wherever you get your podcasts. We'd love it if you rate and review it, or share it with a friend. If you would like to contribute music or a prayer or send us a feedback, write us at wayoflove@episcopalchurch.org.

Miriam McKenney: This Miriam McKenney from Cincinnati, Ohio. Creator God, from the beginning, you have established the sacred pattern of going and returning, labor and rest. Especially today, you invite us to dedicate time for restoration and wholeness within our bodies, minds, and souls, and within our communities and institutions. Give us wisdom and courage to practice resting, saying no to the tyranny of the urgent, instead placing our trusting you, the primary actor who brings all things to their fullness. Amen.

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