



THE *Episcopal* CHURCH 

# THE WAY OF LOVE

with Bishop Michael Curry

## Season 1, Episode 8: Go – Doing our best to live like Jesus

**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 "Go" – cross boundaries, listen deeply, and live like Jesus.

[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 for our final episode of season 1.

**Sandy Milien:** Yes. I can't believe we've made it this far. We've covered turn, learn, pray, worship, bless and rest. That means it's time to talk about go.

**Kyle:** Yes, indeed. As you heard at the top, our definition of go is partly related to this idea of living like Jesus. It will surprise no one to say that we think that that idea is a little bit easier said than done sometimes.

**Sandy:** That's true. We're really glad that Bishop Curry started with an inspiring but also really accessible example to show us and explain to us what go means.

**Bishop Curry:** I can think of so many people that I've known over the years that I've been a priest who embodied that much better than I ever did. I remember a woman in one of my parishes. Yes, she was retired by the time I knew her. She lived in the neighborhood of the church, which was an inner-city neighborhood. She just started feeding kids breakfast on Sunday morning and bringing them to church. It led to some real transformation in that church because more and more kids started coming and all of a sudden, we had a Sunday School growing like crazy. It was amazing.

From this one woman, who in a pretty desperately poor area of the city, really tough area, we ended up creating an after-school program and summer camps. We had to do it because we were being called into it. Not because we thought about it – we never had a committee plan it ahead of time, but because of this one woman who had a heart for children. I don't know that there was a conscious, "I'm going to be a Christian and bring—" I don't think it was like that. I just think she came to church; she knew there was something about God in this place and it's good, to live a godly life and it's got something to do with Jesus. It was just practical. This is real practical kind of stuff.

She said, "Children in this neighborhood need that." Because it was in a big inner-city neighborhood. At that time, I was beginning to realize it may have been the first time in the history post-slavery that a generation of kids in the African American community were actually growing up outside of the womb of the Church.

She wasn't thinking about all that. She was dealing with the kids who were right there, but that is in the context of what was going on. And so after-school programs: we used to have Martin Luther King Day Camp. Sometimes we overdid it with the kids in Sunday School and that kind of stuff. You'd ask them a question. I remember one time one kid said, "The answer is either Jesus or Martin Luther King."

[laughter]

That happened because of one woman. One person who just had something in her heart for children and knew that the church was the right place for children to be. That changed the church. I saw it. I just happened to be the priest there. I saw it. This is a side note, but I remember some nuns when I was in Raleigh, North Carolina, who were always, if somebody was down and out, they were on top of it. I used to joke, I said, "You guys never found a cause or a hardship that you wouldn't jump on and lead." They said, "No. That's what we do. That's following Jesus."

People they're all over. They're all over the place. A woman – and this is in another church, I was a bishop, actually – in a little town in Haw River, North Carolina. I don't remember how she found out, but she found out that – you know how kids, your mother would bring cupcakes or something on your birthday or something when you're in the third grade? That kind of stuff.

Somehow, she found out about that and realized that it wasn't happening consistently for kids in the foster care system. This is a small enough county that you could do it. She just decided she was just going to start baking so no kid would not have a little something to honor their birth into this world in the third or fourth grade, whatever it was.

Next thing we knew, the folk in the church were doing it. They got the supermarket to make sure there's flour, all the stuff, eggs in the flour. The supermarket donated that. This is going on all over the particular county where they were. It went on for years. I don't know if it's still going on, but it went on for—just something simple somebody did because it's the right thing to do. This is a Christian person, it wasn't highfalutin sociology; inside she knew, "This looks like Jesus."

**Kyle:** Feeding, caring.

**Bishop Curry:** Feeding. Yes. It's the gut response to grace. That's what's going on. I'm telling you, that's all over the—even now, actually. I've talked to public officials who are struggling with how to live a life consistent with their faith. That's right, what they really mean, to get more specific, a life in the public spirit that is consistent with what Jesus teaches. That's where the rubber meets the road.

**Kyle:** What do you tell them?

**Bishop Curry:** Don't stop struggling. This is not therapy to ease your anxiety. Actually, the anxiety and the struggle is how you'll figure out how to navigate with integrity.

**Kyle:** Where has the practice Go taken you in the past, how did it teach you to live like Jesus?

[music]

**Kyle:** We're forming these habits, but it's not like we're turning ourselves into robots of you know, if this, then that, where it's clear. We've got the habits, but the habits are the starting point for engaging with the struggle and engaging with the question.

**Bishop Curry:** Yes. The formulaic approach, the notion that if I do X, I read this passage, then I implement what this passage said, and then that's the result or something... that's not real. What you really want is living in scripture enough that scripture becomes part of you. You begin to see and engage the world out of a biblical way of thinking or a way of being, which is getting closer to living the habit of grace, as opposed to trying to be lock step and mechanical about if X, then Y. The truth is, there are a lot of things that happen where they aren't yes and no, good and bad.

**Kyle:** Including in the scriptures.

**Bishop Curry:** Including in the scripture. Yes. It's not all black and white. There's a lot of gray. The more gray hair you have on your head, the more gray you see. But that's life. If you try to have a mechanical view, rather than a formational one, rather than one where you're letting the scriptures form you and shape you over time, which is a way of letting Jesus of Nazareth, letting Jesus form you (Saint Paul in one of the epistles says, "Let Christ be formed in you."), then in those ambiguous contexts, where it's not clear what's right or wrong, you've got the best shot of discerning the best way possible. What is the greatest approximation of love that is possible in this context and then how can I do it?

**Kyle:** That's a great segue into my last question, which is that sometimes when we go, we're going to go and find people who we disagree with. People from different backgrounds, people from different churches, people who don't go to church and we're experiencing that right now in a really profound way in this country and between countries. When we tell people, "Go," what's next? How can we prepare them to go in a way that can help to reach that greatest approximation?

**Bishop Curry:** It's in Matthew, Mark and Luke, but in Matthew's gospel in particular, at the end, after the crucifixion, after Jesus had been killed and then he rises from the dead at the resurrection, the women, Mary Magdalene and the other one go to the tomb looking for him and they get to the tomb and the tomb is empty.

In Matthew's version, and there's similarities in some of the other gospels, but in Matthews' version in particular, there's an angel in the tomb or somebody's in the tomb, it's not Jesus. There's somebody there, a messenger. An angel says to Mary Magdalene in Matthew's version, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" The angel says, "He is not here. He's risen, as he said." Then there's an additional thing, "He has gone ahead of you to Galilee." If you look at the resurrection stories, the stories of Jesus rising from the dead, He never stays in place. He's always going ahead of them. Mary Magdalene tries to grab hold. He said, "Don't hold me, don't grab on me." He says, "Don't cling to me, follow me but don't cling to me."

In the upper room in Luke's version of it where they are in the upper room and he breaks the bread and they realize, "Oh my god, this is Jesus all along." Then it says he vanishes out of their sight. I think what's going on, it's not a magic show. This isn't Houdini. I think what's going on is, the Bible's trying to tell us that this risen, living Christ is the living reality of God in our midst. That reality goes ahead of us. When you go, go to follow

where he has already gone—where the living presence of Jesus Christ, of God, can be found. Go and seek the living presence of Jesus in you and how God is in you.

I don't pretend that I do that all the time, I don't. At least be heading in that direction, and doing it some of the time is potentially transformative. I remember I read Martin Buber's book *I and Thou*. I don't remember a whole lot, it's been a long time. What I do remember was, he talked about the difference between I -Thou relationships and I - It relationships. I-It relationship is where I relate to you as it, as a thing, as an object. He said all sorts of horrible things become possible when you are just an object or something for me to deal with.

When an I - Thou relationship, when you are thou, when there is sacredness about you, and dwelling in you, then I respond to that sacredness in you. Every once in a while, you respond to it in me. When that happens, relationship moves beyond just mere human relationships. Two or three have gathered together and God shows up. That's what it really means to go.

[music]

**Kyle:** Well, we're back and as we come to the end of season one, we realized that we ask you a reflection question each week, but most of the time we don't really answer it ourselves. We're going to rectify that this time around. Sandy, you want to go first? Do you have a Go story for us?

**Sandy:** Yes, when thinking about the reflection question it reminded me of when I was younger, a little girl. We were in a brand-new congregation. Well, my dad was sent out to begin a new ministry in an area where there were no Episcopal churches. It was in a rural area with people who were in the working poor class, socio-economically. The bishop saw that that area needed a new mission, it needed a church, and there was a good opportunity for a young priest like my dad to go there. My dad decided to go with his family.

I remember that most Saturdays, I think, if not every single Saturday, we would have a worship service in the house of someone in the community. We would walk sometimes a little more than a mile to go to those houses. It was a very rural area, there was no accessibility for cars to go through. I remember being maybe, I don't know, five or six, seven, younger than that even. Every single Saturday we would have to go to someone's house and I would be so upset. I'd be thinking, I don't want to go, I want to stay home, or I want to go play with my friends.

It reminded me of something that I've heard my dad preach about a lot. That our mission is to go, is to share and to be witnesses of the truth because that is the job Jesus left us to do, to follow and to preach the Gospel. The message of the Gospel is to literally go. The Church can be and shouldn't be static, it has to move, it has to go. It can't just be a Sunday thing. As those that are called to be the messengers of Jesus, they have to go and go where the people need it the most. You have to get out of your comfort zone. You have to literally walk miles and go to places you don't want to go, places you feel uncomfortable. Then maybe someday I will do the same: take that challenge and go and get over my fear and walk miles to create community with people.

**Kyle:** Well, my Go story, I was laughing. You started yours, "I didn't want to go." I didn't either. My Go story was a couple years back. My wife and I had been living in the Bronx for a year or two in New York City. It was a halfway point between where she was working and where I was working. I got called for a month-long term of grand jury service because in the State of New York, before a case can go to trial, it has to be seen by a grand jury, which was news to me, apparently is not news to anybody who's watched *Law and Order*.

I'm sitting in this in this room full of people realizing, oh my gosh, like most of us sitting here are going to have to do this. I was in my second year of graduate school. I had a job in a church, but getting to spend a month with other people from my community, was really powerful. It made me realize that we don't often go into

these situations where you go from not knowing someone to spending 40 hours a week with them for a month in a tiny little room. For me, the part of Go that is about listening really stuck out in this story.

For me, there was lots of opportunities during grand jury service to listen, because a lot of what we did was waiting for the next set of witnesses, for the next case to come in. We saw like 40 cases over the course of four weeks. We just had a lot of conversations. I got to know a lot of folks that I wouldn't have gotten to know, probably any other way, and got to know them pretty well because I spent a lot of time with them.

**Sandy:** Do you think it influenced or did it help anything in your ministry over there?

**Kyle:** I think one of the things I learned was about how people experience upheaval in their lives. In faith communities, one of the most powerful experiences we have is accompanying people who are going through an experience of upheaval: a divorce, an unexpected illness, a loss. Then also to be with others in the midst of that. It's just that a real close community that forms when you're going through that experience together with people. It's changed how I look at situations of people around me who have had a major transition thrust upon them.

[music]

**Sandy:** Wrapping up our conversation about the practice of going and thinking about the overall picture of this podcast, does anything jump out at you or come to mind as we wrap up?

**Kyle:** The thing that's always with me partly because I edit these and because the last thing we hear is Bishop Curry saying, "The way of Jesus is the Way of Love," I really appreciated the challenge in these conversations, sometimes out loud and sometimes just for my own further reflection, the challenge to really think carefully about the life and teachings of Jesus as being the core all of our spiritual practices. I don't necessarily default to Jesus-language, I tend to use sort of God and Holy Spirit language a lot of the time.

Re-envisioning my spiritual practices as this reflection on and participation in the ministry of Jesus in a way, that's been powerful to me and something that I'm definitely going to keep chewing on as we head into season two. How about you, Sandy?

**Sandy:** Well, for me, doing this podcast and sharing our stories and sharing my stories has led me to actually reflect on my life and think about these seven practices and practicing them more intentionally throughout my day, helping them to build better relationships with the people in my inner circle and even with the greater community. I think these seven practices are spot on to help us live a better life.

**Kyle:** As we record this, you are literally about to go in a very big way. Tell us about where you're going.

**Sandy:** As we're wrapping up, I am going, I am being sent or I've been called to a new ministry that has to do a lot about building a community and creating ways for people to engage with each other. This one I wanted to go, not like my story, I wasn't forced to go.

**Kyle:** Cool. By the time this plays, you'll have been in it a little while and we'll be talking about some of these stories.

**Sandy:** Definitely. Thanks for joining us for this first season of *The Way of Love*. The episode was produced by Kyle Oliver and me Sandy Milien and edited by Kyle. Special thanks to Ana Hernández for providing our theme and reflection music. Check out her website at [anahernandez.org](http://anahernandez.org).

**Kyle:** This week we had additional music from Josh Woodward. His *Lafayette* is published under Creative Commons Attribution License at [freemusicarchive.org](http://freemusicarchive.org). You can subscribe to the show wherever you get your

podcasts. We hope that you will so that you'll know when we come back from our short break. While you're away, we'd especially love it if you'd rate and review it or share it with a friend, which will help us to reach more people as season two approaches. If you'd like to contribute music, a prayer or feedback, write us at [wayoflove@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:wayoflove@episcopalchurch.org).

**Patricia Lyons:** This is Patricia Lyons from Alexandria, Virginia. Just as Jesus went to the highways and byways, he sends us beyond our circles and comfort to witness to his love, justice, and truth with our lips and with our lives. Lord, help us as we go to listen with humility and to bring your healing to a hurting world, and be present to us dear Lord, as we work to live into our identity as the Beloved Community of people reconciled in love with you and one another. Amen.

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