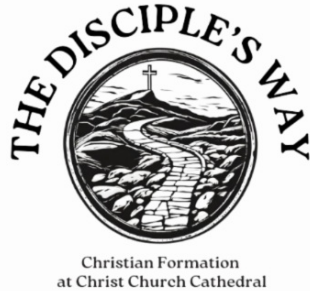




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Week of May 6, 2024:

“Love is the Way”

– *Bishop Michael Curry*

MONDAY, May 6, 2024 - 1 John 4:7-12

God’s power revealed in love

This definitive passage said that loving one another grows out of our identification with the heart of the God of the universe. It isn't just that God loves us, John wrote. God IS love. If the creator’s love is the ultimate source of our life, then, as Bishop Curry put it, "There's power in love. There's power in love to help and heal when nothing else can. There's power in love to lift up and liberate when nothing else will. There's power in love to show us the way to live." *

- "'God is love' does not mean to say that love is one of God's activities, but that all His activity is loving activity. Whether he creates, or rules, or judges, he does so in love. All that he does is the expression of his nature which is —to love." ** Verse 11 called all of God’s children to grow toward loving as God does. What helps you to grow toward having all you do be an expression of love?
- The Greek word *agape* was not the emotional "luv" of pop culture (which can be temporary). *Agape* was a chosen attitude. Believers "are not to think that brotherly love automatically goes on and on. While in many respects it is self-sustaining, it must also be supported by the exercise of the will.... They were not to love them because they were perfect, for they were not perfect.... Love makes allowances. Love tries to help. Love looks at the good people do in preference to dwelling on their defects." *** How can you choose to love in that robust, tough-minded way?

Prayer: Dear God, you ARE love—what a mind-stretching truth. You know it’s not quite as natural for me to love. Please keep loving me as you stretch my ability to reflect your love to others. Amen.

* Curry, Bishop Michael. *The Power of Love* (p. 8). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

** C. Haas, M. De Jonge, and J. L. Swellengrebel, *A Handbook on the First Letter of John*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1972, p. 121.

*** L. L. Morris, article “Love” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997, pp. 697-698.

TUESDAY, May 7, 2024 - Acts 17:2-8

Jesus' message: turning our world right-side up

Love isn't just "spiritual"—it changes the world right now. Bishop Curry noted, "This movement was perceived as somehow reordering the way things were, 'turning the world upside down'....the reason the movement was turning the world upside down was because members of the movement gave their loyalty to someone named Jesus and committed themselves to living and witnessing to his way above all else.... The way of Jesus will always turn our worlds and the world upside down, which is really turning it right-side up." *

- Opposing people or systems in power will often feel like turning the world upside down. Whether in your home, your work, your friendships or your community and nation, those in power tend to want to stay in power, even if they aren't using their power in ways that fit with God's principles. Can you name a time when you opposed a powerful force for reasons of principle? What was the outcome? Regardless of the visible outcome, how did doing that affect your inner self?
- Jesus was counter-cultural and regularly upset the status quo with his teachings and actions. The people who were in charge rather quickly perceived him as a threat, despite his apparently lower status and power than theirs. Jesus tends to upset the status quo of our lives when we become disciples, too. In what ways has Jesus turned your world upside down...or right-side-up?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I don't want to maintain the status quo. I'm ready for you to be in charge, to upset my life in the best way possible. Help me be a part of creating a world that is right-side-up. Amen.

* Curry, Bishop Michael. *The Power of Love* (p. 75). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

WEDNESDAY, May 8, 2024 - Song of Solomon 8:6-7

"Divine flame"—in all true love

On May 19, 2018, over a billion people watched Bishop Curry preach Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's wedding ceremony. Today's reading was the text the couple chose. Bishop Curry summed up the Bible's point this way: "The message of God is very simple. Love one another. Take care of one another. Take care of creation. And while you're at it, love me—love God. Do that and you will find your way. That is the core of the gospel." *

- Putting Song of Solomon in the Hebrew Scriptures (guided, we believe, by the Holy Spirit) showed vividly that God created and affirms human love. The unmarried apostle Paul hinted that God gives some the gift of living celibate happily (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:2-7), but the Scripture never said a celibate person is holier than one who faithfully loves another. Have you, in your own life or the lives of people you care about, seen the beauty and holiness of committed human love?
- Today's reading's passionate poetry saw human love growing out of God's love, extending and expressing it. The phrase "Its darts are darts of fire—

divine flame!” was literally, in Hebrew, “a flame of Yah” (the short form of the divine name from Exodus 3:14). How did that phrase make our ability to love more than a simple biological drive, and link it to God’s serving, self-sacrificing love?

Prayer: Lord God, you created me out of your love, and you planted a seed of that love deep within me. Let me always value and respect the holiness of that wonderful gift from your heart. Amen.

* Curry, Bishop Michael. *The Power of Love* (p. xvi). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

THURSDAY, May 9, 2024 - John 3:3-8

Jesus revealed the key to true life.

Life is a major theme from the very start of the gospel of John (cf. John 1:3-5). So it made sense that, when Jesus met the cautious Pharisee Nicodemus (he sought Jesus in the dark of night), Jesus used the image of birth to point to the new quality of life he offered. As Bishop Curry put it, “He said to Nicodemus, ‘You must be born again.’ In the Greek it can be translated born again, born anew, or born from above. And the point, I think, the only reason to be born is so that you can live. God wants you to live.” *

- How did Jesus connect the ideas of “birth” and “new life” as he spoke with Nicodemus? Trace the role that God’s Spirit, and your openness to the Spirit’s work, play in creating that new spiritual life. In what ways can Jesus’ image of wind working invisibly, yet powerfully illustrate the Spirit’s work in your life? How, if at all, are you living in a new way due to God’s presence in your life?
- Most members of the group called the Pharisees (from a Hebrew word that meant “set apart”) opposed Jesus’ ministry. At times, Jesus felt anger at their hard-hearted “righteousness” (cf. Mark 3:5). Yet he never wrote them all off as “enemies” or “hopeless.” When a Pharisee like Nicodemus showed any willingness, however tentative, to listen, Jesus responded in love. What does his conversation in today’s reading teach you about one aspect of loving your neighbor?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you’ve never written me off; you never will. I open my heart to your Spirit’s work in giving me the refreshing, renewing gift of new life. Amen.

* Curry, Bishop Michael. *The Power of Love* (p. 46). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

FRIDAY, May 10, 2024 - John 13:34-35, 15:9-10

Jesus’ love the source of our love.

Bishop Curry highlighted how the setting of Jesus’ “new commandment” showed that loving is much more than a fuzzy, fluffy sentiment: “This was not long before Jesus’ death, when he would show what love looks like; giving of the self, even sacrificing the self for the good and well-being of others.” * The command to love one another was not new, but “as I have loved you” took “love” to a whole new level.

- Jesus began John 15:9 with ten keywords: “As the Father loved me, I too have loved you.” As the moon reflects the sun’s light, our love for others

reflects God's love for us. In what practical ways do you live out your commitment to love God and others? To what extent are you able to view self-giving, not self-gratification, as key to the kind of love that makes life genuinely worth living?

- Jesus showed the disciples what one writer called “a triad of love.” The Father loves me, Jesus said. In the same way, I have loved you. Now, as I have loved you, love one another. We often fall short, but this kind of love is willing to do the hard work of binding wounds and working to reconcile. How does it bring you strength to know Jesus' love for you is rooted in God's eternal love? How can we live out Jesus' committed, steady love toward one another and our neighbors?

Prayer: O Lord, help me increasingly to love, not as an outward disguise to hide my anger or pain, but from my heart as your love overflows and bubbles out of me to bless others. Amen.

* Curry, Bishop Michael. *The Power of Love* (p. 19). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

SATURDAY, May 11, 2024 - Colossians 3:12-14, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

“Real power. Power to change the world.”

We end each week of the GPS for this sermon series with these two passages. Our “Love your neighbor” campaign is rooted in the kind of life to which these verses called God's people. And if this sounds “soft” to you, less imposing than the campaigns that seem to be all about how awful other plans or candidates are, let Bishop Curry suggest a different perspective. “Someone once said that Jesus began the most revolutionary movement in all of human history; a movement grounded in the unconditional love of God for the world; a movement mandating people to live that love, and in so doing to change not only their lives but the very life of the world itself. I'm talking about power. Real power. Power to change the world.” Want to change the world? Come join in loving your neighbor!

- “As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other.” Sound simple? The perceptive British Christian C. S. Lewis found that it isn't as simple as it sounds: “I find that when I think I am asking God to forgive me....I am asking Him not to forgive me but to excuse me....Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances....that [real forgiveness] we can always have from God if we ask for it.” ** How have you learned that you can't genuinely forgive without loving, and can't genuinely love without a willingness to forgive? As you compare Jesus' positive impact on our world over the last 2,000 years with the sad legacy of all the violent, revengedriven tyrants who've tried to build empires, can you understand Bishop Curry's words about “power to change the world” more clearly?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me clarity about my daily need for your forgiving, empowering grace to nurture and grow me. And grow me into a person who makes forgiving and loving a rhythm of my life. Amen.

* Curry, Bishop Michael. *The Power of Love* (pp. 9-10). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

** C. S. Lewis, “On Forgiveness” in *The Weight of Glory and other addresses*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1976, pp. 178, 181. (Lewis's entire essay on forgiveness is well worth reading.)



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