

Proper 9b 2021
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
July 4, 2021
The Rev. Catherine L. Tatem

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10 Psalm 48 2 Corinthians 12:2-10 Mark 6:1-13

Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God!

Every three years, in first part of July, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church usually takes place. As has happened with many other things in 2020 and beyond, this convention will take place instead in 2022. A legislative body of about 1,000 people: clergy, lay, volunteers and many behind the scenes workers gather to handle the business part of being the Episcopal Church; in the United States alone, we number approximately one and three quarter million Episcopalians. It is normal for our legislative body to consider hundreds of resolutions, which are proposed actions to establish or change the way we in which we conduct ourselves as the body of Christ, the church. It is refreshing to discover that some of the things that we consider “must do” can wait. We will still be the church in 2022.

I invite you to enter into our church’s conversation, our life together, here in Greenville, at The Church of the Redeemer. Business, worship, gathering, being the church: it is Jesus who gives us the actions that are important for us as the body of Christ. On a weekend (and day) on which we celebrate our declaration of freedom as a nation, it is critical for us to remember that we are, first and foremost, children of God.

Jesus set out some very specific guidelines for how to be children of God in the church, how to be Jesus’ hands and feet today. Evangelization in its most positive sense came out of a rejection of Jesus. In the gospel of Mark it is “yet another” rejection: Jesus was healing and preaching, amazing people in the region of Galilee, and making others very nervous. The Pharisees held counsel with the Herodians about how to destroy Jesus – and that was three chapters ago (Mark 3:6)! Jesus spoke in parables, calmed the sea, healed a man with a legion of unclean spirits. Jesus did not make the herdsmen happy when two thousand of their pigs ran into the sea. When Jesus went back to his own country, to Nazareth, his own neighbors questioned him. Their amazement tells us that the neighbors thought that there was something mysterious, maybe not quite right, about what Jesus was teaching. Where did he get all this? “They took offense at him.” (Mark 6.2) Jesus either could not or would not perform astonishing miracles here. “He could do no mighty work here, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them.” (Mark 6.5) Jesus did not throw up his hands, but “went about the village teaching , and he began to send out” the disciples “two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.” It is now we who are Jesus’ hands and feet in the world. Wherever the world tries to thwart the healing power of Jesus, the more people Jesus sends out. Two by two, we never alone in our journey of faith.

Jesus is straightforward about what to do when our message of Christ is rejected. When we leave that place, “shake off the dust that is on your feet for a testimony against them.” This act of shaking off our feet, like shaking off the sand from the beach or dirt from the garden, is a great insult; it shows a total rejection of where we are, that we want nothing of that place to touch us anymore.

We might, in our life, have times in which thoughts of unbelief murmur in our ears, in our being. Jesus tells us not to fuel unbelief, but to shake off those things that contribute to any unbelief within us. Paul in his prison had a thorn in his side, which it may have been a physical ailment, depression, or persecution, and he found God even from his weakened state. Paul's thorn opened his heart to accept God being an active part – a defining part – of his life. We might say that Jesus' thorn in his side was the unbelief that he received in his own hometown. In response, Jesus sends us out, two by two, giving us authority in the name of Christ alone. We are participatory in God's ongoing part in grace. PB Michael Curry invites us to strengthen our belief by walking in the Way of Jesus, the Way of Love. (Last month's Echoes newsletter gave you more information on how to join that Way this summer. Go back and take a look for a personalized path on the Way.) Here is a description of our Christian way:

An Invitation from Presiding Bishop Michael B. Curry to Practice the Way of Love

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. – Ephesians 3:17-19

In the first century Jesus of Nazareth inspired a movement. A community of people whose lives were centered on Jesus Christ and committed to living the way of God's unconditional, unselfish, sacrificial, and redemptive love. Before they were called "church" or "Christian," this Jesus Movement was simply called "the way."

Today I believe our vocation is to live as the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement. But how can we together grow more deeply with Jesus Christ at the center of our lives, so we can bear witness to his way of love in and for the world?

The deep roots of our Christian tradition may offer just such a path.

The Way of Love: Practices for Jesus-Centered Life – outlines a Rule for the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement.

By entering into reflection, discernment and commitment around the practices of **Turn - Learn - Pray - Worship - Bless - Go - Rest**, I pray we will grow as communities following the loving, liberating, life-giving way of Jesus. His way has the power to change each of our lives and to change this world.

TURN: Pause, listen and choose to follow Jesus

Like the disciples, we are called by Jesus to follow the Way of Love. With God's help, we can turn from the powers of sin, hatred, fear, injustice, and oppression toward the way of truth, love, hope, justice, and freedom. In turning, we reorient our lives to Jesus Christ, falling in love again, again, and again.

LEARN: Reflect on Scripture each day, especially on Jesus' life and teachings.

By reading and reflecting on Scripture, especially the life and teachings of Jesus, we draw near to God and God's word dwells in us. When we open our minds and hearts to Scripture, we learn to see God's story and God's activity in everyday life.

PRAY: Dwell intentionally with God daily

Jesus teaches us to come before God with humble hearts, boldly offering our thanksgivings and concerns to God or simply listening for God's voice in our lives and in the world. Whether in

thought, word or deed, individually or corporately, when we pray we invite and dwell in God's loving presence.

WORSHIP: Gather in community weekly to thank, praise, and dwell with God

When we worship, we gather with others before God. We hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, give thanks, confess, and offer the brokenness of the world to God. As we break bread, our eyes are opened to the presence of Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are made one body, the body of Christ sent forth to live the Way of Love.

BLESS: Share faith and unselfishly give and serve

Jesus called his disciples to give, forgive, teach, and heal in his name. We are empowered by the Spirit to bless everyone we meet, practicing generosity and compassion and proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ with hopeful words and selfless actions. We can share our stories of blessing and invite others to the Way of Love.

GO: Cross boundaries, listen deeply and live like Jesus

As Jesus went to the highways and byways, he sends us beyond our circles and comfort, to witness to the love, justice, and truth of God with our lips and with our lives. We go to listen with humility and to join God in healing a hurting world. We go to become Beloved Community, a people reconciled in love with God and one another.

REST: Receive the gift of God's grace, peace, and restoration

From the beginning of creation, God has established the sacred pattern of going and returning, labor and rest. Especially today, God invites us to dedicate time for restoration and wholeness - within our bodies, minds, and souls, and within our communities and institutions. By resting we place our trust in God, the primary actor who brings all things to their fullness.

Walk the way of love, dear friends, as we join the psalmist and say:

Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! Amen.