

Sermon Year B, Proper 16, 14th Sunday after Pentecost

8.25.2024 John 6:56-69

Preached at Austin Heights Baptist Church, Nacogdoches, TX

Holy Spirit, take my words and speak to each of us according to our needs. Amen.

Good Morning!

I always feel as if I should introduce myself,
as I am a regular attendee
of this fabulous little church—and even though a lot of you know me,
some for a long time...

but I am not one of your clergy.

I'm Wanda, and I am the Episcopal deacon at Christ Church
here in Nacogdoches. Pastor Kyle
is a great friend and mentor of mine, and he asked me
to bring the sermon this morning.

I am always so happy to be here!

So, just for fun, and because I know this afternoon
will be your ice cream sundae party,

I'm going to bring you an "Episcopal-flavored" little talk.

The Gospel readings assigned
for the last four weeks have all centered around
the theme of "The Bread of Life."

As great as that Bread is,
we find in this reading from the Gospel of John
that the people are getting really discouraged.

They have hung in with Jesus
so far, but at this point

They just seem to be feeling worn out
with trying to figure out
why Jesus is saying

he is giving us his own self,
his own flesh and blood, for our coming journeys.

And, he says, it is truly the only thing
that will really nourish us.
Oh, the people WANT to believe him,
used to believe him,
but now they just kind of want to give up.
I can relate to that.
I have my own moments
when Jesus' promises
don't seem to be enough;
when I am so discouraged by what
is going on in this broken old world,
and what seems so hopeless to my heart.
But look,
even after many of his disciples gave up
and no longer followed Jesus,
He says to the Twelve:
"Will YOU go away?"
And Peter answers him,
"Lord, to whom shall we go?
YOU have the words of eternal life."
It's Peter, bumbling, often obtuse Peter,
who **does** know where to look...
Peter knows that Jesus is telling the truth,
and that they **must** believe him,
and stay with him a while longer.

In the Episcopal Church, we have a Presiding Bishop
elected to serve for ten years, and to lead all our
churches. The one we have right now is
Michael Curry, and he is a real live wire.
He is about to retire, but he gave us,
during his tenure, a suggested practice for all Episcopalians
called The Way of Love.
Well, it may have been a new offering
to our church, but it is actually
a very OLD practice, and I will talk
about it a bit today.

Bishop Curry teaches that Jesus
inspired a movement in the first century...
during the days that took place in our Gospel reading today.
It was a movement
adopted by a community of people
whose lives were centered on Jesus Christ,
the itinerant rabbi, and his people
were committed to living the way of God's
unconditional, sacrificial and redemptive love.
So, long before there was a Church
or people called Christians,
this Jesus movement was simply called "The Way."
Bishop Curry believes our vocation now
is to live as a 21st century branch of the
Jesus Movement.

The big question, he asks, is can we grow together
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?
He suggests that the deep **roots** of
our Christian tradition will offer such a path.
For centuries, monastic communities
have shaped their lives around
rhythms and disciplines for following Jesus *together*.
They call the pattern for this a "Rule of Life."
Bishop Curry has outlined a Rule of Life
for us, now, in the 21st century Jesus movement.
It is designed to be spare and spacious,
so that individuals, ministry groups, and congregations
can flesh it out in their own unique ways
and build a treasure trove of stories and resources.
There is no specific order you need to follow.
If you already keep to a Rule of Life or
some other spiritual discipline,
you might think about how **your** path

intersects with this one.

The idea is

to enter into reflection, discernment and commitment
around the practices of

Turn–Learn–Pray–Worship–Bless–Go–Rest.

These are seven practices

we can follow, and they can have the power
to change our lives and the world.

Here is a brief explanation of these seven steps,
or practices.

First of all,

TURN: Pause, listen and choose to follow Jesus

From Mark 2:14

*As Jesus was walking along,
he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus
sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him,
“Follow me.” And he got up and followed him.*

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, freedom, and JOY.

In *consciously* turning,
we reorient our lives to Jesus Christ–
falling in love again, and again, and again.

Second,

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

From John 14:23,

*“Those who love me will keep my word,
and my Father will love them,
and we will come to them,
and make our home with them.”*

Lord, grant us so to hear the Holy Scriptures,

and to read, mark learn, and inwardly digest them,
a prayer from our Episcopal Book of Common Prayer.
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 our ordinary lives.

Third,

PRAY: Dwell intentionally with God daily,

Luke 11:1

*"He was praying in a certain place,
and after he finished, one of his disciples
said to him, Lord, teach us to pray,
as John taught his disciples."*

Lord, hear our prayer.

Jesus teaches us to come before God
with humble hearts,
boldly offering our thanksgivings and concerns
to God, or, simply quietly listening for God's voice
in our lives and in the world.
So, whether in thought, word, or deed,
individually, or corporately,
when we pray, we dwell
in God's loving presence.

Fourth,

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

Luke 24:30-31

*"When he was at the table with them,
he took bread, blessed and broke it,
and gave it to them. Then their eyes
were opened, and they recognized him."*

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.
I know you all experience this too...
when we break bread, in Holy Communion,
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.

Fifth:

BLESS: Share your faith and unselfishly give and serve.

Mathew 10:8 "Freely you have received, freely give."

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.

I think Austin Heights is really good at this one!

Tip your server, return your shopping cart. Pick up some trash.
Hold the door for the person behind you. Let someone
into your lane. Small acts have a ripple effect.
That's how we change the world for GOOD.

Sixth, **GO: Cross boundaries, listen deeply, and live like Jesus.**

John 20:21

*"Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father
has sent me, so I send you."*

We are sent into the World to witness to God's love.
Just as Jesus went into the highways and byways,
he sends us beyond our circles and comfort zones—
To witness to the love, justice, and truth of God

with our lips and with our lives.

“We’re not going back!”

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.

And last, **REST: Receive the gift of God’s grace, peace, and restoration.**

John 14:27

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you.

I do not give to you as the world gives.

*Do not let your hearts be troubled
and do not be afraid.”*

God gives rest to the weary and renews
the strength of those who are spent.

From the beginning of Creation

God has established a sacred pattern
of going and returning, of labor and rest.

Especially today, it seems to me that 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 holy one who brings all things to their fullness.

So— these are the seven steps to the Way of Love,
what we can call a Rule of Life.

Some of us feel scattered and tired

in our faith walk. We might feel like

the followers of Jesus that day who turned back,
and no longer went around with him.

But Jesus said to them,

“The words I speak to you are Spirit and Light.”

And, he urged them, “Believe **me**,

the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

That is the great promise of Jesus,

our resurrection promise,
as true for us as for the disciples over 2000 years ago.
If we follow his Way of life,
the sacraments will call us back
to see God clearly at work for us
through water, bread, fruit of the vine—
in combination with God's almighty word
of forgiveness, mercy, acceptance and life.

I hope I can follow Bishop Curry's Rule of Life
to help me through times of doubt and fear
and weariness.

It has been a long, hot summer,
and some of us are weary disciples...
but here is where to find just what we need.
Lord, keep us believing your powerful promise
that you will stay with us,
hold on to us,
and love us forever.

Help us to

Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go and Rest.

May the peace of God be with you all. Amen.