



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea
The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida

10-10-10 Sermon Pentecost 8A
July 23, 2023

“The Jesus Movement” and Michael Curry”
A Homily by the Rev'd Jo P. Popham

When Stacy, our oldest, was just a toddler, she had a picture in her mind of what Jesus looked like. We were driving into Washington, D.C., and there was Jesus walking in Dupont Circle. It was warm and the windows were down, and Stacy started calling out to him and telling us it was Jesus on the street corner. The man in the long white tunic was what we at the time might have called a “Jesus freak.” The Jesus movement that had begun in the late 1960s and early 1970s all over North America and Europe. It ended in the early 1980s almost as uneventfully as it had begun. The short-lived Christian hippie counterculture Jesus Movement was a part of some strands of Protestant churches. To some the message of peace and love was as unwelcome then as it seemed to be to some in the 1st century. And sadly, the notion of a peaceable nation and the idea of loving all people with abandon still is foreign today.

Our own Ericca was gone a couple weeks ago, because she was attending “It’s all about love: A Festival of The Jesus Movement” in Baltimore, Maryland. She shared with me our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry’s sermon from that festival.¹ I commend it to us all as a booster shot on who we Christians – we Episcopalians – are. He was just out of the hospital, and he preached for just over 42 minutes.² He recalled that many times after his sermon at the royal wedding, on the way home and many times since people have commented to him: “I didn’t know that Christianity was about love.” My friends, how can we revive the church so that people hear and accept and know in our hearts that God loves them? How could people not know what Christianity is about? And how could we not know what being an Episcopalian is all about? In his first address as Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry announced that we, The Episcopal Church, are the Episcopal

branch of Jesus' movement in this world. His goal has been to inspire and encourage the church and all of us as part of the church to embrace our vocation as part of the Jesus movement in the world. I don't know about you, but as a life-long Episcopalian until Bishop Curry I had never heard the church described as part of The Jesus Movement. Our PB did not invent The Jesus Movement. No, it began much earlier. And it began long before the days of peace and love in the 1970's. It began much earlier. The Jesus Movement began with the first followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Did Jesus Christ himself start this movement? Not intentionally, just as he did not come to establish a church in his own name. No, he came to offer us the image of God as a loving creator who wanted creation to love as much as they were loved. As Bishop Curry preached last week, "If God is love, you and I were made by the hand of love. If God is love, this world is made by the hands of love. And that means we were made to love and to be loved and to give love. And we will find our lives when we live in the love of God."³

Bishop Curry has chosen a metric by which to measure his performance as Presiding Bishop.⁴ His wish is for every Episcopalian, (or most) to know a Bible verse. And he suggested this one: The text says, "Beloved, let us love one another because love is of God. And those who love are born of God and know God. Those who do not love do not know God because God is love."⁵ That one Bible verse from the 1st Epistle of John is perhaps "the most succinct, precise, clear theological statement of the nature and the being of God."

And now we – as beloved of God – are being led to do extraordinary things as part of the Jesus Movement.⁶ Michael Curry has called us to be evangelists and a force for reconciliation. He has said: When Jesus said "go make disciples of all nations," "all" really meant all.⁷ We all are invited to join The Jesus Movement, the loving, liberating, life-giving Jesus Movement. Imagine with me how the world would change if 2 million Episcopalians actually went out into the world following the teachings of Jesus and living in his spirit. If we lived into our baptismal covenants, embracing our call to share the good news of God's reconciling love that we know from the love of Jesus, things would

change, wouldn't they?⁸ We must find ways to heal what divides us so that we can truly be in community with everyone. Everyone. Michael Curry has said: "I'm willing to plant myself on the side of the love of God and my experience in life is that when you do that, you're trusting in God to find a way that you might not even be able to envision."⁹

The 1st century disciples had to choose between following Jesus or the old ways of their community. We too are at a crossroad in our daily lives, "in our communications, and in our relationships wherein we are challenged to follow Jesus," but it is an infinitely more interesting road than most. And we have such wonderful company on the road with us. And "when we choose to follow and love Jesus, we find we all are "changed by the Gospel" and changed by the community of God and the Christian church and even the Episcopal Church."¹⁰ We are changed so that we can be an active part of the Jesus Movement, but we can have confidence, because Christ is with us. If we stay "in a living relationship with the God who the Bible says is love—when we live in relationship with that God following in the footsteps of that Jesus who teaches us the way—when we do that there is no power in heaven or earth or under the earth that can stop this movement."¹¹ Wherever we live and work and love and pray, Jesus has already gone before us to make it easier for us to carry the message of redemption and love and acceptance and inclusion and reconciliation to the world. It is up to us to let the world know that there is a God who loves us all, a God who loves us and will not let us go.¹² We Episcopalians have promised to do the work of the church – to be the Jesus Movement. Yes, it is a more difficult path to choose given all the challenges in today's world. People love power, and that drives some to undo God's love for all. But do not underestimate the power of love, my friends.

Bishop Curry began his sermon not by quoting two icons of peace he had not seen – Mahatma Gandhi and Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli – but Jimi Hendrix whom he saw in concert as a teenager. Bp. Curry believes that Jimi Hendricks may have done a riff on Jesus's commandment to love one another as God loves us when he sang "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, then the world will know peace." We peace-

mongers from the Jesus Movement of the 70's did not have it all wrong. When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace.¹³

Lord, may it be so. Amen.

¹ To see and hear his 2023 sermon at the “It’s all about love: Festival of The Jesus Movement” <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/publicaffairs/presiding-bishop-michael-curry-delivers-opening-sermon-at-its-all-about-love-festival/>.

On June 27th, 2015, at the 78th General Convention, Michael Bruce Curry, who had led the Diocese of North Carolina for 15 years, was elected as our next Presiding Bishop and Primate. He was elected on the first ballot with an overwhelming majority of both houses of the convention.

² I only have 10 minutes. Pity!

³ See above sermon at the “All about love festival.”

⁴ He said that he thought it better for him to decide on this metric rather than the Executive Counsel or the General Convention.

⁵ I John 4:7-8.

⁶ Bishop Pierre Whalon, the former Bishop of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, addressed the newest wave of the Jesus Movement. He said: “It does not drown people, it washes us and makes us fit for the Kingdom of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁶ Bishops Curry and Whalon have captured and redefined the “Jesus Movement.” Michael Curry often has said that Jesus came and a movement began.

Bishop Andy Doyle of Texas has said that it is clear that Jesus was responsible for revealing God to the new discipleship community that was still in its infancy but growing in their understanding of who God was and who Jesus was and who they were called to be. Jesus came to make the perfect will of God known and to act that will out for humankind.

⁷ Huffington Post article 10/30/2015, “New Presiding Bishop Envisions a World Transformed by God’s Love”, Huffington Post article published 10/30/2015.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Huffington Post article 10/30/2015 above.

¹⁰ See The Rt. Rev. Andrew Doyle’s blog, “Hitchhiking the Word.”

¹¹ See Bp. Curry’s Jul 2023 sermon above.

¹² Online address to the Episcopal Church, Office of Public Affairs, November 2, 2015.

¹³ Bishop Curry’s sermon at the July 2023 “All about love festival” cited above.