

THE POWER OF LOVE

At Christmas 2019 I was given a lovely book, "In this Light ~ Thoughts for Christmas."¹ It contained this inspiring entry from Bishop Michael Curry, who preached at the Royal Wedding on May 19th 2018. I had toyed with the possibility of editing out the references to Christmas but upon re-reading I have decided to share it with you unedited.

A Note before Christmas

My dear friends,

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.' (John 3: 16 NRSV)

Friends, at its core, Christmas is the way of love.

Jesus of Nazareth willingly gave up his life not for anything he could get out of it, but for the good, the well-being, the welfare, the salvation, the emancipation of others. An old gospel song I remember hearing as a child spoke of his unselfish sacrificial death and sang in the refrain, *'Now that's love'*. The unselfish, sacrificial way of the cross, which is the way of Jesus, is nothing less than the way of the very love of God. Not syrupy sweet or sentimental, but sacrificial. This way of love is the liberating way that leads to real life.

The late Raymond Brown, in his commentary on John's Gospel, notes that this text speaks of love not only in the unselfish way of the cross, but in the unselfish way of Christmas.

An ancient Christian hymn now found in Philippians (2: 3–11 NRSV) says that in coming into the world God 'emptied himself' in order to share our lives and to show us the way. I suspect the poet Christina Rossetti realised this when she wrote

*Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine,
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and Angels gave the sign.*

This way of Jesus, which is the way of love, can change lives and ultimately can change the world. And the reason is simple. This way of love is nothing less than the way of God, our Creator!

So how do we, as Teilhard de Chardin said, 'harness for God the energies of love'? How do we internalise, organise and mobilise love in such ways that it is let loose in and among us until we all are set free? How do we cultivate and nourish a Jesus-centered life in such ways that his way of love becomes our way of life?

Are there ways, practices, disciplines, tested by time, that can help us to learn the ways of love?

The good news is that the answer is an unequivocal yes!

And it's not rocket science. It's actually quite simple. But it is not easy, because it involves intentional practices for a Jesus-centered life on our part. These choices together are like a formula for how to live: a Rule of Life, if you will. I like to call it the Way of Love.

It's fairly easy to remember: Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go and Rest.

Turn – pause for a moment, and ask yourself how you might do things differently.

Learn – try reading the Bible a little each day, especially Jesus' life and teachings.

Pray – talk to God each day, in whatever way works best for you.

Worship – visit a local church, maybe with someone who already goes.

Bless – find at least one way to make a difference in someone's life today.

Go – chat with someone who talks or thinks differently from you.

Rest – spend time outside, relax with a book, do something that brings you peace.

When we make simple but intentional choices, then we find that love is in all of it. The struggles that you and I face are real. But oh, that love that comes from God is even more real, and powerful enough to see us through it all. This Christmas, and in the New Year, choose to Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go and Rest ... And don't forget those who are struggling or suffering this Christmas season. Remember them in your thoughts and prayers every day.

If today you feel more burdened with sadness, grief or worry rather than filled with joyous hope, remember this: God's love is real, God's love is powerful and God's love is there for you.

God love you. God bless you. And may God hold us all, the entire human family and creation, in those almighty hands of love.

Your brother, Bishop Michael Curry

If you want to be reminded of Bishop Michael's Sermon at the Royal Wedding, here is the link:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44186049>

Keep safe and stay well Suzanne Churchwarden @ Fillongley

¹ *In this Light - Thoughts for Christmas* by Archbishop Justin Welby and friends. Published by Harper Collins 2018