

GO! We are the Jesus Movement
The 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church
The Rt. Rev. Michael B. Curry
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Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

Before I say anything, I must again say thank you to you, Almighty God, for the privilege and the possibility of serving as Presiding Bishop-Elect. I love this Church, I love our Lord, and God is not finished with us yet.

To our Presiding Bishop, who has been an incredible leader—

We go back 15 years. We were ordained bishops in the same year, and this is a woman of God. She has led the people of God with courage, passion—

Now her passion is a little different than mine. I told the bishops, I want to get a little bit of cool from her.

She has been an incredible God-sent and God-inspired leader.

And I so look forward to working together with President Jennings. We’ve known each other off and on over the years and—

I’m older than she is, I’ll say it that way.

I’m probably not.

I really do look forward to working together with her. Leadership is not easy, and she has exercised it here at this convention with grace and clarity. I look forward to working with you, my sister.

And then lastly—I know they didn’t move the service up to 8:30 so I had more time to preach—but I must offer a word of disclaimer before getting into the sermon. I didn’t know what the text was going to be for today; I had no idea that it would be the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” And when I saw what the text was, all I could do was say, “There’s a sweet, sweet spirit in this place.”

Matthew ends his Gospel telling the story and compiling the teachings of Jesus with Jesus sending his disciples out into the world with these words: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have taught you.” And remember, I am with you in the first century and in the 21st. “I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.”

I am more and more convinced that God came among us in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth to show us the way to be reconciled with the God who deeply and passionately loves each and every one of us, to be reconciled and right with that God and to be reconciled and right with each other as the children of that one God who created us all. He came to show us how to get right and how to get reconciled. He came to show us therefore how to become more than simply the human race – that’s not good enough

– came to show us how to be more than a collection of individualized self-interests, came to show us how to become more than a human race.

He came to show us how to become the human family of God. And in that, my friends, is our hope and our salvation, now and unto the day of eternity.

Or to say it another way.

Max Lucado who's a Christian writer says "God loves you just the way you are, but he [doesn't intend] to leave you that way."

Jesus came to change the world and to change us from the nightmare that life can often be to the dream that God has intended from before the earth and world was ever made.

Julia Ward Howe said it this way, during America's Civil War, an apocalyptic moment in the history of this nation if ever there was one:

In the beauty of the lilies

Christ was born across the sea.

With a glory in his bosom

That transfigured you and me.

As he died to make [folk] holy

Let us live to set them free

While God is marching on.

Glory, glory hallelujah

God's truth is marching on.

Now I've got one word for you. If you don't remember anything else I say this morning, it's the first word in the Great Commission: GO!

Don't do it yet, but go!

And the reason I lift up that word "go" is because we are the Jesus Movement.

Go!

Let me tell you, I began to realize something—I stumbled into it a few months ago— while I was getting ready for Advent and I was reading the Gospel Advent messages for the three-year cycle.

I noticed something I hadn't seen before.

I noticed that all four of the Gospels preface the ministry of Jesus not only by invoking John the Baptist, but they preface the ministry of Jesus by quoting Isaiah chapter 40: "Prepare the way of the Lord, / make straight [] a highway for our God"

And if you look back, go back to Isaiah 40, Isaiah says:

Prepare the way of the Lord,

...

For every valley shall be exalted,

Every mountain and hill made low,

The crooked straight and the rough places a plain,

And in this the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,

And all flesh shall see it together.

The Bible's trying to tell us something about Jesus. This brother didn't come into the world to leave it the way he found it. He came to change it until valleys are lifted up and mountains are brought down, until the world is righted the way god dreamed it. The landscape of our reality and lives is changing.

The story behind Isaiah 40—and I won't get into all the details—is that the people of God found themselves free one day and in slavery the next. This time it was not a slavery of Pharaoh's Egypt; this time it was the slavery of exile in Babylon.

For indeed in the year 586 BCE, the armies of Babylon began a prodigious March of conquest throughout the Middle East. Eventually they came to Palestine. They razed the countryside, moved toward and fought their way to Jerusalem, breached the walls of the Holy City, entered the city and burned much of it, and killed people. They entered the Sacred Temple that Solomon had built and desecrated it. And then they took many of the leading citizens and they carted them off to Babylon where they made virtual slaves of them.

It was a nightmare.

In Babylon they sang, as old slaves used to sing, "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child, a long, long way from home."

In Babylon one of their poets wrote:

By the waters of Babylon,

we sat down and wept,

When we remembered thee, O Zion.

When we remembered what it was like to be home.

How shall we sing the Lord's song

In a strange land?

And then it happened, almost as swiftly as they had been enslaved by the nightmare of the world, they were set free by the treaty of God.

See the Babylonians who had conquered were conquered themselves. Have you ever played that game King of the Mountain? Somebody's gonna knock you off.

Or as that great philosopher Frank Sinatra said, “You can be riding high in April and shot down in May.”

And so an emperor named Cyrus came to the throne in Persia. He conquered the Babylonians and as a kind of “in your face” to the Babylonians, everyone the Babylonians had enslaved, Cyrus set free. He issued an edict of religious toleration. We thought pluralism and multiculturalism was new. Cyrus did that a long time ago.

He issued an edict of religious toleration, the Jewish people were set free, they went home, and as they were on their way going home, one of their poets said: Prepare the way of the Lord, for everybody shall be exalted, every mountain made low, the crooked straight.

And we’re going home!

The nightmare has ended, and God has changed the landscape of reality, His dream has broken out!

My friends, all four Gospels preface the story of Jesus by pointing us back to that story in Isaiah. Jesus came to show us the way, to change the landscape of reality, from the nightmare it often is into the dream that God intends and we, my friends, are part of the Jesus movement.

So go!

Now if you still don’t believe me, go see the movie.

Now I’m not commending the movie I’m about to mention because I actually haven’t seen the movie itself, but it’s the movie Son of God. It came out about a year ago if I remember correctly, and it kind of got eclipsed because Noah with Russell Crowe came out at the same time.

Everybody knows that would certainly have told the story accurately.

Anyway, the movie Son of God—again I’m not commending it because I haven’t seen it.

But the trailer is really good.

And in the trailer there’s this one scene, where Hollywood conflated several biblical versions, of the story of Jesus calling Simon Peter.

And Peter is fishing in the Sea of Galilee and Jesus comes along. Peter’s not catching any fish—and you can see he’s frustrated—and Jesus comes along and says something like, “What’re you doing, brother?”

Sometimes when you read the Bible, you gotta read between the lines and imagine what the expressions were like.

When Jesus says, “Well, what are you doing?,” Simon Peter says, “I’m obviously fishing.” And then Jesus says, “Well why don’t you put your net on the other side of the boat?” And you know Peter’s been there all day, and you can assume he probably did know something about Jesus, and knew the brother was a carpenter, not a fisherman.

And therefore, he was probably thinking, you don’t know a thing about this, but what I’ve been doing all day isn’t working—

Which is a parable for the church today, but I’ll leave that alone.

Jesus said if it's not working for you, put the net on the other side and go where the fish are, don't wait for them to come to you—

That's another message for the church.

So anyway, Peter takes the net and casts it on the other side of the boat and then the next scene—now this is in the trailer, I haven't seen the movie—the next scene is under the water and the camera is looking up.

Now this is clearly Hollywood, and you can see Jesus' image kind of refracted through the water. You can tell it's Jesus because he has a beard.

And then he takes his finger, and he touches the water, and the water starts to quiver and shake like the old song, "Wade in the Water."

"God's gonna trouble the water."

That's Hollywood. That wasn't in the Bible, but neither was Cecil B. DeMille, and I actually like his version of The Ten Commandments.

So anyway, the water is quivering. And then the next scene goes up on top, and you see Peter, and probably Andrew and John, they're hauling all of the fish. They've got so many, the net is breaking.

Notice they listened to Jesus, and caught more fish than they did when they were doing it on their own.

That's another lesson, but we'll talk about that later.

Anyway they're trying to pull up all these fish, and then Jesus comes along and says, "Peter, now come and follow me."

Now again, imagine what was going through Peter's mind: I'm finally catching some fish, and you want me to follow you?

And Jesus says, "Come on and follow me," and Peter says "Where are we going ?!"

Jesus says, "To Change the world."

God came among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth to change the world, to change it from the nightmare it often can be into the dream that God intends. He came to change the world, and we have been baptized into the Triune God and summoned to be disciples and followers of this Jesus and to participate in God's work, God's mission of changing and transforming this world. We are the Jesus Movement now.

And his way can change the world. The Diocese of Ohio has popularized a way of capturing Jesus' summary of the law: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. On these two hang all the law and the prophets.

It's all about that love.

Duke Ellington said, "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing."

It's all about that love!

The Diocese of Ohio says it this way: “Love God, love your neighbor and change the world.”

With this I’ll sit down.

I will.

In May of 1961, now-Congressman John Lewis, one of the Freedom Riders, was a young man. He together with other young men and women, black and white, were Freedom Riders who dared to trust the recent Supreme Court decision with regard to interstate transportation, seeking to end and eradicate Jim Crow in our land. They were on a Greyhound bus, 13 of them, headed from Washington through Virginia and North Carolina, through South Carolina and heading onto New Orleans, Louisiana. When they stopped in Rock Hill, South Carolina, just to fill up the tank, go to the bathroom, get something to eat, they were met there by hooded night riders. They were met there by those who would burn a cross for hatred instead of the reason behind the cross: love.

And they were beaten, many of them nearly beaten to death.

John Lewis was beaten not only there but also on that Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. He bears on his body the marks of Jesus, and so do so many others.

Now fast forward, 48 years later. John Lewis is a Congressman from Georgia. One of his aides tells him there’s a man named Edwin Wilson, who wants to meet him.

Mr. Wilson came in, he met John Lewis, and he said “I’m one of the men who beat you and the other Freedom Riders in Rock Hill in 1961, and I’ve come to apologize and to ask you to forgive me.” Lewis forgave him. He said in the book where he told the story, “I accepted the apology of this man, who physically and verbally assaulted, but this is the testimony of the power of love, the power that can overcome hatred.”

This is what Jesus taught us to do.

God came among us in the person of Jesus to reconcile us with each other and in so doing to change the world. We’ve got a day of crisis before us in this country.

We’ve got a day of crisis before us in this global community.

We have enormous challenges before us as Church and followers of Jesus.

But as St. Paul said in Romans, “With God before us, who can be against us?”

Or as Bishop Barbara Harris said—

How do you like that, Paul and Barbara Harris?

As Bishop Barbara Harris said, “The God who is behind us is greater than any problem that is ahead of us.”

We are part of the Jesus Movement, and that movement cannot be stopped because we follow a Lord who defeated death and follow a Lord who lives.

We are part of the Jesus Movement, and he has summoned us to make disciples and followers of all nations and transform this world by the power of the Good News, the gospel of Jesus.

And look at us: We're incredible!

Have you seen all the babies crawling around this convention? They're all over the place!

Some of us are babies!

Some of us are children. The children are right here. You can't see them—

Hey, guys! Hey!—They're waving—How are you?

Some of us are children!

Some of us are young people. They've been here.

Some of us are young adults, and they've been here, and they're gonna change the world!

Some of us have got AARP cards.

I do!

And some of us—help me, Jesus—some of us are Republicans. And some of us are Democrats.

But if you've been baptized into the Triune God, you are a disciple of Jesus, and we are all in the Jesus Movement.

What God has brought together, let no one tear asunder.

Some of us are labelled traditionalists—Help me, Jesus!

Ready? And some of us are labelled progressive.

I don't care whether your label is traditionalist or progressive, if you've been baptized into the Triune God, you're in the Jesus Movement.

See, we are all different. Some of us are black and some of us are white, some of us are brown.

But I like that old song that said:

Jesus loves the little children,

All the children of the world.

Red and yellow black and white,

They are precious in his sight.

Jesus love the little children of the world.

I don't care who you are, how the Lord has made you, what the world has to say about you, if you've been baptized into Jesus you're in the Jesus Movement and your God's.

Therein may be the Gospel message of hope for the world. There's plenty of good room.

Plenty good room.

Plenty good room for all God's children.

For in the beauty of the lilies—Christ was the one who taught us this.

With a glory in his bosom

That transfigured you and me.

As he died to make [folk] holy

Let us live to set them free

While God is marching on.

Glory.

Glory, hallelujah.

God's truth is marching on.