

Discussion Guide for *Crazy Christians*

By The Rev. Michael Curry

Session 1

WMA Revival Info

Foreword and Preface

Outline of This Book Study

What is a Revival?

From the Diocesan Website:

“A revival is a dedicated series of gatherings that combine inspiring worship, compelling teaching, honest faith-sharing, intensified prayer, and some form of engagement with the mission of God—all for the sake of the spiritual renewal and transformation of people and of society.”

The WMA Revival Prayer

God of the living,

Your faithful love has made us a people of hope. This hope is your gift to be shared. We wonder how to share Jesus’ mission of mercy, compassion and hope in this time, in this place. We hear voices that cry out for your justice. We see children who long for bread. We are waiting for your Word to spark our imagination. We are trusting that you will lead us to a deeper praise that touches hearts and lifts up those who are bowed down. We know that if we wonder, listen and wait, you will revive your people. We thank you for guiding our way and for what we, as yet, cannot see. In Jesus’ name we pray. AMEN.

For the latest information on the Revival, please visit our website: <https://www.wmarevival.org>

Looking ahead at what these five sessions will cover:

Session 1 – Foreword and Preface - Introduction to the Study; WMA Revival Information

Session 2 – Chapters 1-4 – What is Episcopal Evangelism?

Session 3 – Chapters 5-8 – Telling our Stories

Session 4 – Chapters 9-11 – The Way of Love

Session 5 – Chapters 12 & 13 – Wrap-up; Introduction of Events to Follow the Revival

Foreword

By The Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori

The foreword begins with the question, “What does it mean to be a faithful Christian in the twenty-first century?” Everyone probably has their own answer to this question. Is anyone willing to share what they think it means to be a faithful Christian in this day and age? As we begin exploring Bishop Curry’s writings, your answer to this question may evolve (and that’s OK!), but try to think of where you are right *now* at this very first session: What does it mean to be a faithful Christian in the twenty-first century?

Preface

Bishop Curry mentions a woman, Verna J. Dozier, who seems to have only spent a short time with him in the 1980's and 1990's, but was able to teach him many things. Specifically, he mentions her ability to help people (Episcopalians, other Christians, and others in general) engage with the Holy Scriptures in a way that was accessible to them wherever they were on their faith journeys.

Think about:

Who has helped you become engaged with God? With your Church community?

Discuss:

What traits do Verna and the people you thought of share that you can use to help others engage with Christ in some way in this day and age?

The Way of Love

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love>

****At this point, go over the dates of the upcoming meetings and what chapters/themes will be discussed. If people are still looking for copies of the book, make sure we have the ability to help them attain their own copy before the next meeting****

Session 2
Chapters 1-4
What is Episcopal Evangelism?

Chapter 1 - We Need Some Crazy Christians

Bishop Curry mentions several people who did “crazy” things, who were crazy like our Lord, specifically Mary Magdalene and Harriet Beecher Stowe, as people who marched to the beat of a different drummer.

Put yourself in Mary Magdalene’s time. Could you have been there at the crucifixion? Would you have been able to join her and the other women who went to the tomb on Easter morning? It is easy to sit back, knowing what we know of those events and say, “Yes! I would have been there!” But the odds of any of us joining her would be small, most of us probably would have been like the apostles—absent.

Bishop Curry references the people mentioned in the Apple commercial (<https://youtu.be/cFEarBzelBs>) who were seen as people who made a difference. That commercial is now 21 years old, but the people featured in it still inspire us today. Only three of them are still living (Bob Dylan, Richard Branson, Ted Turner). If you were going to make that ad today, whom would you add? Whom could we look at today like the people in that campaign, like Mary Magdalene, like Harriet Beecher Stowe? Who could join the ranks of those “crazy” folks?

How can you go out into the world like they did and walk to the beat of a different drummer?

Bishop Curry videos that relate to this passage:
 On the bravery of Mary Magdalene going to the tomb:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIIqvYmC-PU>

Chapter 2 - We Are Part of Something Greater Than Ourselves

Bishop Curry mentions that God has a habit of asking the impossible of people. He describes this habit as “terrible.” “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). Yikes. The WHOLE world? That seems like an awfully big thing to ask. Something that Bishop Curry quickly points out is that the disciples didn’t even know where all the world was. They knew Palestine, their corner of the world. What they could actually do was go into their community and proclaim the good news.

Many of us probably face situations like this in our daily lives. I know many Berkshire County Episcopalians who have participated in local and national marches in the past couple of years: The Women’s March, The March to End Gun Violence, Keep Families Together, The Hope & Healing Prayer Pilgrimage for the Opioid Crisis. Maybe you or someone you know has written letters or stood in your town square holding a sign. Oftentimes people comment on those events, “What can you really change from here?” As if our corner of the world is without influence. Like

the disciples, Moses, Mary and Joseph, Bishop Curry's father, and so many others, we are trying to be a part of something greater than ourselves.

The Dalai Lama once wrote, "Just as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, the actions of individuals can have far-reaching effects."

What are some ways that your congregation or you personally have worked to be a part of something greater than yourselves?

Chapter 3 - Following Jesus with Our Feet

One of Bishop Curry's main points here is that our differences are so important and, in many ways, we are united because of them. It can be difficult to see that sometimes. He mentions how large churches need smaller churches, small churches need large churches, small towns and rural areas need larger cities, larger cities need small towns and rural areas, etc. His list goes on and on. We don't just follow Jesus with our feet, we also use our hands, "our selves, our souls and bodies." Sound familiar? Many of us probably say or hear those words each week.

Building off the idea from Chapter 2 of being something greater than ourselves, I'm sure many of you can think of a time when you have had a disagreement with someone over one of those seemingly opposed groups Bishop Curry mentions towards the end of this chapter. His overall message here: We need each other. In Chapter 6 there is a larger discussion about the walls of division. As a way to prepare for that discussion, please begin thinking about walls of division within your life and how they have shaped your walk with Jesus.

Chapter 4 - Living Into God's Dream

Bishop Curry mentions Herbert O'Driscoll, who wrote, "When we share the good news of Jesus with others, we need to share that good news as we have experienced it." This chapter begins with the story many of us know, of Joseph and his brothers from Genesis. Maybe you know this story only from the Bible. Maybe (like me), you're more familiar with the musical version ("Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat"). Maybe you know the newer translations, in which the special robe given to Joseph by his father, Jacob, is described more simply as "a long robe with sleeves," or "an ornamented tunic." Wherever version you are most familiar with, the end result is the same: Joseph saves his entire family from famine and death, because of his dreams. The same dreams that led his brothers to plot his death, ultimately saved them all.

By the end of this chapter, Bishop Curry calls us to become dreamers, just like Joseph. He describes the ways in which he sees that dream as he prays with the Muslim man on the plane. What is your dream? What would you add to his examples of what our world could look like? Maybe your dream has to do with something in your own parish, or town, or in this county . . . or maybe it is larger than that. Like the ripples discussed in Chapter 2, don't think that your dream isn't grand enough, remember that it can have far reaching effects.

Episcopal Evangelism

See *Evangelism Charter for the Episcopal Church*; and the handouts for Evangelism 101, especially “Unpacking Episcopal Evangelism” & “Defining Episcopal Evangelism” – all may be found at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/evangelism-toolkit>

Concluding thoughts: Several times in these first four chapters, Bishop Curry quotes George Bernard Shaw as saying, “Some men see things as they are and ask why. Others dream things that never were and ask why not?” Why not go out into the world as a “Crazy Christian?” Why not be a part of something greater than yourself? Why not follow Jesus with your feet? Why not live into God’s dream? Think about what stops you from doing these things. If you can’t think of anything stopping you, then what can you do to help others on their own journey with Christ?

Session 3
Chapters 5-8
Telling Our Stories

Chapter 5 - A Mountain Climb That Can Change the World

Bishop Curry notes that in the Bible, mountains are often scenes of close encounters with God: what in the Celtic tradition are called "thin places." He begins the chapter with Isaiah's famous "vision of peace," where the wolf will lie down with the lamb" and "they shall beat their swords into plowshares." We live in an area full of hills and mountains. Have you ever climbed a mountain? What did you experience?

Bishop Curry describes several transformative experiences in the Bible that occurred on mountains (Moses and the burning bush, the giving of the Law, the Sermon on the Mount, the Transfiguration). In each case God invited someone into his presence and taught them, then sent them out to change the world. The Bishop then describes several transformative experiences in his own life. Have you ever had a "mountain-top" spiritual experience? What happened? How did it change you?

The revival has the potential to be one such experience. We are invited to come, learn, and then go out, leaving open the possibility—or risk—of being challenged to live differently.

Chapter 6 - Down with Walls of Division and Up with the Dream of God

The world of Jesus' time was full of walls (literally, in the Temple) and divisions between Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, free and slave, male and female. Bishop Curry cites the passage from Ephesians: "[Jesus] is our peace ... he has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us." What barriers/walls between you and your fellow human beings have you experienced (either participated in or been victim of)—political/racial/economic/sexual, etc.?

Bishop Curry describes how his father's experience of the common chalice in Jim Crow days drew his father into the Episcopal Church, and how his own processing of the ordination of Gene Robinson (openly gay) led him to rethink the walls in his own life. He notes that the Gospel plan is to reconcile all things in Christ, restoring the world of creation and continuing the universal appeal of Pentecost: "when anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation." Has your understanding of Jesus' all-encompassing love and desire to reconcile the entire world to himself changed the way you feel about and/or behave toward people most different from you? How has it done so? How can you be better at this?

Chapter 7 - The Savior's Not-So-Serene Call to Life on a Wild, Restless Sea

Bishop Curry revels in allusions. Does this chapter remind you of hymns, prayers, Scripture, other literature in addition to passages he identifies?

Bishop Curry quotes a story by the Rev. Canon Theodore Wedel about a simple lifesaving crew that eventually “developed” into a lifesaving society in which being a member of the in-crowd was more important than the work the group was intended to do. Has any enterprise in which you’ve been involved lost track of its original purpose in a similar way? Was the problem remedied, and if so, how?

Bishop Curry believes that Jesus calls us to the tumult of the restless sea of the world’s pain and problems—injustice, divisions among groups, war, health, climate change, etc. To what tumult have you felt called to act? How did you respond?

Chapter 8 - When Upside Down Is Really Right Side Up

Bishop Curry describes how the right-side-up (normal) world of Jesus’ time is very far from the peaceful, reconciled world to which Jesus calls us. Knowing Jesus changed the disciples and enabled them to change their world. He notes that knowing Jesus better and better requires a disciplined inward journey of prayer, study of Scripture, and worship. How has being a follower of Jesus changed you and turned your world upside down, so that things you once thought normal no longer seem right?

Bishop Curry several times quotes a statement by Margaret Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” Have you ever been part of a group of thoughtful, concerned citizens acting to change the world? Were the group’s efforts successful to any degree? How did being part of such a group change you?

Telling our Stories

See the handouts for Evangelism 101, especially “Sharing Your Story” (which includes exercises) and “Prompts for StorySharing about Faith in a Church-Related Setting” at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/evangelism-toolkit>

Session 4
Chapters 9-11
The Way of Love

Chapter 9 - Keep Your Eyes on the Prize, Hold On, Hold on

Bishop Curry expands on Matthew's story of Peter walking on water to stress the importance of our staying focused on Jesus. What enabled Peter to walk on water was his intention to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, who set the example. In following in Jesus' footsteps we commune with him, and his power works through us. Peter stumbled when his attention turned to the wind and waves.

“Discipleship is about loving as Jesus loves, giving as Jesus gives, forgiving as Jesus forgives, welcoming and including as Jesus welcomes and includes, doing justice and loving mercy and walking humbly with God.”

This focus is as essential for the church as for individuals. The church is unified to the degree that it focuses on Jesus, and is fractured to the degree that its attention turns away.

To be Jesus' hands and feet in the world is to act out, in ways large and small, his preferential treatment for the poor and downcast.

How focused on Jesus would you say you are? What distracts you? What would it take to see past those distractions?

What more might you do to enact Jesus' preferential treatment for the poor and downcast? Bishop Curry relates the powerful witness of a white man years ago in South Africa tipping his hat to a Black woman he passed on the street. What small witness such as that might you be able to make?

How focused on Jesus do you think are your parish and diocese? How distracted? How does either entity support your discipleship? How might it do so more?

Chapter 10 - The Outstretched Arms of Jesus and the Limitless Reach of Love

The chapter opens with John's story of Jesus, shortly before his crucifixion, saying, “I, when I'm lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself,” including the foreigners who had asked Philip if they could meet Jesus.

God's mission has been “to draw all people, to invite, to welcome, to include all within the embrace of those arms that were stretched out ‘on the hard wood of the cross.’”

As a result, Jesus calls us in the Great Commission to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” As Paul later said, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free,

there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” On the first Pentecost, all heard the message in their own language.

When we draw closer to God, we also draw closer to each other.

“Part of our calling from the Lord is to join hands with other people of good will and of other faiths to build a social and global order that reflects God’s dream and vision for us all.”

Bishop Curry quotes Jesus saying, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.” Is your parish, diocese, church truly for all people? If not, who is missing and why? What could be done to become more so? What are the challenges to doing so?

He reports asking himself the question “Is Church just a game we play, a show we put on, or is something really important going on here?” Is there something really important going on in your parish and diocese? Can you describe it? Are you part of it? If there isn’t, what of importance could be going on? How could you help bring it about?

Chapter 11 - *E Pluribus Unum*: God’s Dream, Our Hope

The chapter begins by recounting the first Anglican baptisms in America, in 1587, jointly of a Native American adult and an infant child of English settlers as a symbol of the unifying force of faith.

It then quotes at length John Donne’s eloquent claim that “no man is an island.” All are connected. In the church we understand this as all being essential parts of the body of Christ.

Bishop Curry lifts up examples of parishes that have managed to cross artificial but powerful barriers of race, class, politics, sexuality and other considerations. He then laments that in this regard we have so far to go.

How unified across social barriers is your parish and diocese? What could make it more so? What are the barriers to doing so?

Can you imagine a project emanating from your parish that would help unify people across barriers?

He described the development at the 2008 Lambeth Conference of bishops of “indaba” groups—“indaba” being the Zulu word for a conference or council of wisdom. In each group, bishops from diverse situations listened to each other’s concerns, with those from better off parts of the world listening especially closely to those from less well off ones. Can you imagine what such a process might look like in your community?

The Way of Love

See <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/explore-way-love> , especially the Way of Love Materials.

Session 5
Chapters 12-13
Wrap Up, Introduction of Events to Follow the Revival

Chapter 12 - The Gospel Witness of Welcome Will Rearrange the World

Bishop Curry says that the gospel witness of welcome is the key to Jesus' ministry. Cite examples of hospitality in the gospel. How does your congregation exercise hospitality? How do you exercise hospitality in your daily life?

Bishop Curry also notes that gospel way of welcome can be demanding. When have you felt the strain of the demand of welcome? When have you abandoned welcoming practices because of those demands? How might you work around those demands?

The Bishop details lessons we can learn from the disciples in the Acts of the Apostles. (p. 117) Which of his examples excite you? How might these ideas change how our churches approach the holy work of hospitality?

Bishop Curry tells the parable of the rearrangement of portraits in the Diocesan offices in North Carolina. What needs to be rearranged in your church, both literally and figuratively? How can we make our spaces and our church lives more completely reflect God's dream for us?

Chapter 13 - Come, Let Us Go to Galilee

Studies show that the fastest growing religious designation is "unaffiliated" or "none." Describe the people you know who fit into this designation? What do you think are their highest values? Why do you think they shy away from church affiliation? What might we do to get to know them better? How could the church change to serve them better?

Bishop Curry says, "We are here, as the Jewish tradition of *tikkun olam* teaches, to heal and repair the creation. We are here to love the God who created us and to love and care for each other as children of the one God, as the human family of God. We are here to transform what often is a nightmare of sin and death, hatred and violence, animosity and bigotry into something more closely resembling God's dream of a renewed and transformed human family and creation. I believe that our hope as the human family depends on our getting that right."

What does this spark in you? How might our hope as a human family depend on these ideas? What are some specific ways we, as individuals and as church communities, embody these imperatives?

Bishop Curry explores the idea that, as Christians, our accent should betray us—that is that our actions should reflect the love that we have been given. This same idea is reflected in the hymn "They'll Know We are Christians by our Love." What do your actions define in you? How do

others see you? What do you do in your daily life and work that shows that you are a follower of Jesus?

Bishop Curry says, “I am convinced that our goal as a Church is... to make disciples.” How does your congregation go about making disciples? What opportunities are you missing? How can we better “live, witness to, and share the gospel of Jesus Christ”?

Wrap Up, Introduction of Events to Follow the Revival

- See the handouts for Evangelism 101, especially “Hospitality 101: Inviting, Greeting, Incorporating”.
- Refer again to WMA Revival website, especially for the latest information on events to follow the Revival.
- Emphasize the “plus one” aspect of the Revival – everyone is urged to bring someone from outside of their own church community to the Revival.