

Word of God: speak to us. Speak through us. Amen.

The first practice in the Way of Love is one that might surprise you: Turn.

How is "turn" a spiritual practice?

I think of spiritual practices as being things like prayer and retreats – but Turn?

Those who developed this Way of Love distilled the primary actions for a

Christ-centered life down to one-word essentials, and so they got to Turn.

It makes sense – we spend our lives turning toward, and turning away.

So it is with our spiritual life – we are invited daily to turn toward God,

toward love, which also means turning away from all that is not God, not love.

Let's talk first about turning toward. We turn toward things that snag our attention. So Moses turned to see this marvelous, bizarre sight – a bush clearly on fire but not being consumed.

So John the Baptist turned toward Jesus, whom he knew to be the Messiah –

How? He'd been told "The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is he." So he testifies after Jesus' baptism, as Jesus goes by,

"Look! There goes the Lamb of God!" The Messiah strolling by the water – as miraculous and bizarre in its way as that burning bush was for Moses.

And two of John's disciples hear him – and they turn to look.

And they do more than look – they **turn** toward him and follow him.

And then Jesus turns: he **turns** toward them and asks, "What do you want?"

See, when we turn to Jesus, we're not left standing there – God also turns to us.

This turning is intrinsic to relationship in God.

When they reply that they are curious he simply says, "Come and see."

That is an invitation God makes to us every single day, "Come and see."

"Come and see what I'm up to. Come and see how much I love you.

Come and see what my love can do through you.

"Turn" is the beginning of our taking up that invitation.

As Andrew and the other disciple spend the day with Jesus,

they become convinced that he is indeed the Son of God, as John said he was.

Andrew's first move is to invite his brother Simon to meet this man who is God.

And Jesus renames Simon "Cephas," or "Petros" – the rock.

Look where that turn led the church.

Every turn toward is also a turn away, right?

So our choosing each morning to turn toward Jesus, towards love, means we also choose to turn away from all that is not God, that is not love, that draw us from love and from God.

Turning encompasses repentance – the daily turn to Jesus is also a turn away. One Hebrew word for repentance means literally to turn.

To stop in your tracks and go a different direction.

“I’m sorry” is not repentance. Turning and going a different direction is.

In *this Way of Love in Challenging Times*, I suggest another turning:

We need to be intentional about turning away from darkness and deliberately turning to light; turning away from an obsession with bad news, with fear, with anxiety, with rage and outrage – all of which are perfectly normal responses to the moment we are in. And yet, they are very corrosive.

We need to be aware of what’s happening in the world, in the nation, but not to dwell in darkness.

We are to dwell in light, and that requires spiritual strength - hence spiritual discipline, practices that, like physical exercise, make us strong at the core.

The darkness can envelope us; the challenge can overwhelm us.

So we are called at this moment to turn away from despair and intentionally turn toward hope. That will make us the kind of people that God can use.

As we turn toward hope, we are inevitably turning toward Jesus.

He is our hope. Peter – that rock – wrote,

“Always be ready to give an account of the hope that is within you.”

So we are called at this moment to intentionally cultivate our hope;

to become friends with it, to become intimate with it the hope that is within us.

To be able to speak out of hope, to act out of hope, to live out of hope,

to proclaim it and make it contagious, that others might catch hope from us.

I can think of no more powerful impact we can have in these days than to be spreaders of hope. That is one reason I’m promoting this 40 Days of Prayer For Our Nation – prayer seeds hope.

This turning is not only a matter of mind over matter, or spiritual exercise.

We need to make it physical – our bodies hold so much of the emotion and trauma and joy we experience. We too often leave our bodies at the door when we enter into worship, especially now when we’re sitting down the whole time.

I listened to a podcast with a trauma specialist, Resmaa Menakem, talking about body work, and he taught a practice which can release some things that our bodies hold so that we might become aware of them in mind and heart.

It grabbed my attention, because it involves turning.

So I'm going to appropriate this practice for us to try this morning.

First, get comfortable in your seat; feet flat on the floor, nothing crossed or tense.

- ◆ Stare straight ahead – become aware of what is still floating in the air, and what has landed in your body.
What of what the week has brought, or this morning has brought, or my words have stirred up – what has landed, and where?
Is there pain or tension in some part of your body? Heaviness? Lightness?
- ◆ Now, he said, turn to look over your left shoulder – but turn not only with your neck but also with your hips. This releases something. Make a real turn – and let's say that over your left shoulder is what is causing you fear or anger or anxiety or concern. If you're like me, there may be a lot. Stare at that.
- ◆ Now turn away from that and back toward the center, and look up.
If you imagine God is up, look toward the source of power and love, toward the source of solutions, toward the source of peace that defies understanding. Look at love.
- ◆ And now turn and look over your right shoulder, again with your neck and your hips, a full turn. And let's say that there is the hope of which we are to be carriers. Build a relationship with it. Invite it to join you.
- ◆ And come back toward center. Does anything feel different? In your body or your mind? Sit with whatever you're feeling for a bit.

This is way of embodying the spiritual practice of Turn in these challenging times.

Try making this a daily practice, or some other embodied ritual movement

toward Jesus, toward love, toward hope.

Incorporate it every day for a week, and see what that might change.

That's a piece I did not do the last time we went through these Way of Love practices – I didn't invite my body to the party. This time, I'm going to develop a ritual of movement for each practice and invite you to try it on, or get your own.

There's another place in our lives where turning is important – that is dancing. You may not feel this is much of a time for dancing in our nation, in our world. Yet our scriptures promise, "I will turn their mourning into dancing."

We are invited to dance now, by faith, to dance into the promise we uphold,
into the hope we are training ourselves to lift high.

So dance this week, when you are at your lowest, when you are most joyful,
when you are angry or grieving or laughing.

Wherever you are, take a moment and dance this week, dance with Jesus.

Remember that that hymn:

Turn, turn, wherever you may be. I am the Lord of the dance, said he.

To turn, turn will be my delight, till by turning, turning we come round right.

Amen.

John 1:29-43

The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.' And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.'

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.'