



## The Way of Love: TURN

**Pause, listen and choose to follow Jesus.**

*As Jesus was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. – Mark 2:14*

*"Do you turn to Jesus Christ ...?" – Book of Common Prayer, 302*

**Like the disciples, we are called by Jesus to follow the Way of Love. With God's help, we can turn from the powers of sin, hatred, fear, injustice, and oppression toward the way of truth, love, hope, justice, and freedom. In turning, we reorient our lives to Jesus Christ, falling in love again, again, and again.**

from [www.episcopalchurch.org/wayoflove](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/wayoflove)

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# Whose Turn?

Sometimes I wonder where all the badness in the world originates. So much hatred, lying, devaluing and defrauding. So much sexual harassment and abuse, physical abuse, verbal abuse, exploitation and manipulation. Where does it all come from? After all, how many people get up in the morning and say, “Today, I think I’ll be on the side of evil. I think I will try to do as much bad as I can do, as much damage as I can manage. Yep. That’s my goal – to be abusive and unjust!”

I doubt many people, if any, think this way. I doubt people set out to be evil or bad to others. Instead, we err by what we don’t see and don’t think, in habits that live outside of our awareness. I have desires, things I want. But I don’t want to admit to being selfish, so I justify those desires – for money, popularity, promotions, romance or whatever – and then get angry at people who get in the way of them. I see the faults of people who are in my way rather than my own faults. I rationalize about myself and what I want while I see the dysfunctions and bad motives in everyone else.

As I drive my car through the city, I determine that people who drive faster than I drive are reckless and crazy, while people who drive slower are public nuisances who waste everyone’s time. All of them are impeding my way – keeping me from driving exactly how I want, exactly where I want. When I check out at the store, I see the person who checks me out slowly as “resentful” or “incompetent” rather than overworked or underappreciated. Arriving home, I sometimes do the same with family, being critical or grumpy or apathetic rather than grateful that someone actually puts up with me, with all my criticism, ingratitude and apathy.

When I think of turning, or of the traditional term “repentance,” I think it must be in reference to these habits of my false or negative self. Repentance, I feel, should involve turning away from such ways. Yet nobody (besides fundamentalists) talks much of repentance these days. To some, the term is too negative, judgmental and condemning. It often comes across as a demand for others to repent. And when it is all about other people’s need to repent, then repentance becomes another form of condemning others and failing to see ourselves. This subtle perversion is not lost on people being told they need to repent. And no one responds well to this.

Jesus called people to repentance, according to the gospels. And yet I sometimes think that Jesus came to call other people to repentance. The truth is, Jesus came to call me to repentance, and not somebody else. Jesus tells me daily to remove the splinter from my own eye so I can truly see others and respond to their fatigue, pain and stress in a way that is helpful. Jesus calls me to come to terms with my own problems, my own tendency to judge, my own failure to love and empathize, to tip over into the negative treatment that other people appear to deserve. Jesus doesn’t call me to judge others, condemn others, or tell them about their flaws.

Repentance is not about them; it’s about me. And the more deeply I can repent, the less I will be taking out my problems on everyone else. The more deeply I can acknowledge that I am the one who is stressed, self-centered and self-justifying, the less I will be swept into hateful and devaluing treatment of others. The more I repent, the more gracious I can be with the faults of others who are just like me. The more I repent, the more I can let go of the never-ending

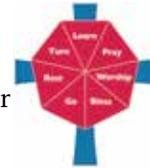
struggle with God to control the world and get what I want.

As a psychiatrist, I meet every day with people who have made a conscious decision to look at themselves and work on themselves. They have only come to work on themselves because they have stopped blaming everyone else, and stopped pretending that they have life under control. They have come to admit that they have problems like anger, depression, anxiety or addiction. I see such people humbly admit that they are stressed, overwhelmed or weak. But listening to them, I do not pity them. I admire them. I find myself in awe of them, and in awe of the process by which this humble 'confession' results in growth, healing and personal liberation. I also notice how extraordinarily appealing people are without the usual defensiveness and guardedness that characterizes everyday interactions. It is easy to empathize when others are so vulnerable and ready to admit their problems. How good life would be, if we could all live in this mode all of the time.

It seems very straightforward, when put this way. All of us look at our own faults from time to time. We are vaguely aware of them most of the time, and acutely aware of them every once in a while. But it is extraordinarily difficult to maintain an ongoing clear awareness of myself in this way. Instead, I regularly fall into negativity and projection in weak moments of forgetfulness, fatigue and stress. Why is it so hard to be watchful or mindful of myself on a moment-to-moment basis? Why is it even harder to welcome moments of feedback about ways I have been hurtful? I believe it is difficult because it is painful. By painful, I do not mean the kind of pain that goes with guilt and self-hatred. Never have I found those to be helpful in turning and doing better.

I am talking about the simple awareness of myself, warts and all: All of my talents and my limitations, my victories and defeats, my cringe-worthy moments and my greatest

hits. It is painful to see the pettiness, self-centeredness, weakness, and lack of courage in myself, even taking all the positives and successes into account. It is a painful process of slowing down, reflecting upon myself, observing myself, grieving myself, and realistically accepting myself, every day. And admitting, as quickly as I can, the ways in which I fail and hurt others, every day. It is a painful, mundane, and privately embarrassing task. And it is the only way I will ever do better. Those who are perfect, after all, can never do better. The perfect have only one alternative: To continually experience the misery of the faults of other people. *R*



### For Reflection and Discernment

- What practices help you to turn again and again to Jesus Christ and the Way of Love?
- How will (or do) you incorporate these practices into your rhythm of life?
- Who will be your companion as you turn toward Jesus Christ?



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