



## Jesus Hacked: Storytelling Faith

a weekly podcast from the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri  
<https://www.diocesemo.org/podcast>

### Episode 032: Becoming Beloved Community- the labyrinth

In this special episode we hear from the Rev. Charles Wynder, Jr. He's the presiding bishop's Staff Officer for Social Justice and Advocacy Engagement. This November he spoke to the annual gathering of the diocese at convention on Becoming Beloved Community, the Episcopal Church's long term commitment to racial healing, reconciliation, and justice. The first part of his conversation sets the context for this work, and how it is vital to our faith and our church.

Chuck Wynder: I want to share an outline of becoming Beloved Community through the PowerPoint that Canon Stephanie Speller developed to help give us an overview of becoming Beloved Communities.

So, when we look at this video, [<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/updated-resources?wtime=0&wemail=john%40domain.com>] you see that Bishop Curry, who starts with the Jesus movement, and as I mentioned, Bishop Curry is talking to us and challenging us to put Jesus at the center, right? And so how many folks have heard of the Jesus Movement?

And so as you know, the Jesus Movement is really centered on the early Christians who weren't called Christians, but we were called what people of the?

Audience: The way.

Chuck Wynder: The way. And as people of the way, we were committed to embody, and study and follow and practice. That's what discipleship is, right? Actually living out the way of the teacher, of Jesus' loving and liberating and life-giving ways. And so grounded in that, we're talking about a situation of the Jesus Movement as an ongoing community of people following Jesus and to loving and liberating and life-giving relationships with God, each other and creation.

Notice the image on the left: loving, liberating, life-giving, the Jesus Movement. At the center is Jesus. Jesus's loving, liberating and life-giving ways in those relationships with each other, reconciliation with creation, right creation care and with God, evangelism.

Those are the focal points that we're focused on in this triennium and that Bishop Curry plans to bring into and other presiding officers have agreed to be a focal point for the next triennium. So there will be legislative committees focused on evangelism, creation care and reconciliation at the next general convention.

And so, we're talking about becoming the Beloved Community and you'll see there the labyrinth, and in the labyrinth you'll see the four areas. How many people have created the labyrinth? It's not linear. There is no necessarily single entry point or beginning and there's not an end. So the notion of checking it off, the notion of achieving it, getting it done to move onto something else, it doesn't exist in the labyrinth.

And the labyrinth is a spiritual practice and it's a practice that ... praying a labyrinth is a spiritual practice that allows us to deepen our relationship with God. It allows us to censor ourselves. It can be part of our spiritual formation. So we have the labyrinth and at the center is what?

Jesus. The cross. So becoming Beloved Community, what does it look like? The church itself is not the Beloved Community, itself automatically. No. We become Beloved Community, we work to Beloved Community with people inside the church and outside the church, but the church has a unique call to do the work and become a Beloved Community, of building God's Kingdom here on Earth. It's not an organization of individuals. It's an adventure of consecrated men and women, the priesthood of all believers, lay and ordained, seeking a new

world who forget themselves in their passion to find a common life, commonwealth issue really, where the good of all is a quest of each.

How many people are interested in being part of the Beloved Community as the movement of God in the world as it relates to being part of the Jesus Movement? It's a natural output. It's a natural output. It gives us something to hold onto, you say, "What does our work look like?"

So, this plan, this invitation of becoming Beloved Community has four different points, four different parts of the labyrinth if you will, of emphasis. The first one is telling the truth. Who are we? What things have we done and left undone? Sound familiar. What things have we done and left undone regarding racial justice and healing? Now church-wide, one is invitations and one of the ways we'll be looking at that is through church-wide initiatives of my colleague and friend, Heidi Kim, is the lead staff person on, of an audit of Episcopal structures and groups of, you know to answer that question of who are we? What do we look like? And how does what we look like reflect to what the community and the world looks like?

We're a predominantly white church, but we are not a white church. I've had to have that correction, conversation with your dear friend, Michael Kinman, 'cause the church is not a white church. It has historically, predominantly African American congregations, historically a predominantly Afro-Caribbean and African-Asian and within that Asian American and Asian specific [inaudible 00:05:20], a Japanese congregations largely, Chinese congregations largely, Korean. It has Native American congregations largely. It has large numbers of Latino congregations that, some look different within their national presentations, some are more Mexican Americans, some can be more Honduran, and we know that Cuba is looking to rejoin the Episcopal Church.

The Episcopal Church is not just in the United States. So who are we? Yes, it is a predominantly white church, but it is not a white church. So with the increase in diversity in the world and in the country, how does what we look like, how can we leverage that? How can we work to not only become more personal, what is our responsibility to engage in the communities around us as they change? To engage in the mission of God in the way that allows us to promote racial justice and healing. And the first question is to tell the truth of who we are, the things we've done and left undone, what are our practices that have ... that we need to address in order to promote racial justice and reconciliation? So that's the audit and not a full census as such, but some way of sort of looking at accounts of who we are and where we are.

And so connected though with also the telling of the truth of what we've left undone, things we've done and left undone, and then proclaiming the

dream, what does Beloved Community look like in this place? It's going to look differently in its particularities in different parts of the church. Which is why there was a gathering and convening of women in Province Nine, that was held in Panama City, which used to be in Province Nine, but that was a place where people could gather. Where the women gathered to talk about race and reconciliation in Province Nine. What does it look like in Province Nine? In this largely Latino area, what does it look like in terms of the Afro-Latinos? In terms of the white Latinos? In terms of the indigenous? In terms of the folks that see themselves as Mestizo? What does it look like in this particular place? What behaviors and commitment will foster reconciliation and justice in here? Right?

That's informed by who we are and what needs to be done and left undone. And so we proclaim a dream that's grounded in what? The center, Jesus' loving, liberating, life-giving ways. But the mission of the church ... and the mission of the church is to further reconcile us to God and each other in Christ. So we can't do that if we don't know who we are, if we don't address what we've done and left undone and then also we have to know where we're going. And we're called to proclaim the dream. That's how we do the work, remember?

This is a prayer book. Your bishop says we don't need another prayer book, we just need to live it out and the church initiative there is to engage in regional, and public, sacred listening and learning engagements. And we're trying to do that around the church. The National Cathedral did some of that recently. It was inside the Cathedral Church and they did it one day. And then the next day it was for, not just the diocese, but the broader region.

The piece where the folks in Province Nine, they were doing sort of the same type of engagement as in this room. In southwest Virginia they're doing it on their own. It's not being funded by the church-wide office. The Diocese of Texas has agreed to partner with the united Bishop staff to do something in Texas. Texas looks a lot like the United States. Right? It does. If you've ever been to Houston, it does. It does. And notions of the intersection of class and race and place are there in Texas and so they're looking at it. But that'll look different than here, so we're looking for a place in the Midwest where we can talk about the things, and how race and racism play out in terms of those old lines that still exist, in terms of on this side of the river, on this side of the highway that came through and divided up communities. What is the implication of race and class as it relates to the industrialization and the loss of jobs?

So that looks different in the northeast than it does in the Midwest. Dealing with race, but race is also contextualized. And so we want to have these regional learnings where we can learn and listen and that informs the proclamation of the dream.

And so then we talk about practicing the way of love. That is part of what you all have been doing with your anti-racism or dismantling racism commission. They provided learning space, or learning while doing space so that this diocese, the members of the congregation, the lay and ordained leadership and people in the community ... I believe I remember that Chester Hines said when we were here last that there were some spaces where some secular groups had engaged your curriculum. But practice in the way of love is ... we, none of us, as a mentor of mine says, none of us know everything and all of us know something. In a learning community, there's shared learning. There's personal mastery not for the purpose of power over, but the constant ... what we do as Christians, ongoing formation, of learning, and doing, of being a disciple.

So in that notion that ... and also, we all need to learn because ... another thing he likes to say, so if you run into this guy named the deep boss and you say, "Hey, all of us ... none of us know everything and all of us know something." And the next thing you'd like to say is, you can't know a crooked stick, that you are holding a crooked stick or maybe you are a crooked stick until you see in him what a straight stick is. Right? I used think that my fingers were straight, until I did like this. And so, the way that we do this around race and racism and working to be healers and justice bearers, is that we have to recognize that we need to grow as reconcilers, not just that we know something about white privilege, not just that we know history. All of that is important, but it's for a purpose. It's for us to live into the way so that we can be reconcilers.

You heard Bishop say that, "Those who are reconciled become reconcilers." I think that's what he said. How do we grow as reconcilers? Healers? Justice bearers? In doing this we are joining God in God's mission of justice and love, healing, renewal and transformation and peace. And how will we actively grow relationship across dividing walls and see Christ in each other? We have to study that, meditate on that and practice as part of our spiritual development. Integrating things like centering prayer. Engaging the Eucharist while we do the work, something that Kathryn Meeks has developed a curriculum around the diocese of Atlanta. And now there's a center, the Absalom Jones Episcopal Center of Racial Healing, centered on the Eucharist, doing this work.

And so you see there that one of the initiatives being led by the Reverend Hershey Mallette, is the Beloved Community story-sharing campaign and she's working closely with Canon Stephanie Speller's on that so that we can share our stories. When we listened in the Episcopal Young Adult Ferguson Pilgrimage, which was not a field trip, it was not a tourism, it was a spiritual pilgrimage and it was structured that way, with 25 highly racially, ethnically diverse folks from all over the church.

When your bishop spoke and then ... removing himself from the center, so that the young adults would exercise a shared leadership, how he listened to passion, respectful passion, grappling, how his presence then shaped a young, adult woman saying, "Can we move into a circle?" And then the grappling deepened. Right? Tracy Blackman went around the room and saw all this stuff, listened to some. And she said this is ... when I walked her to her car ... I am from Virginia, so I walked her to her car ... and she said, "This is good work. This was good work." It's not all the groups engaged, had gone deep in that way. This was a spiritual piece. The other pieces were important to me.

And so then we want to house and make sure we do this with multi-lingual formation and training, because as I said, the issue of racial justice and healing and reconciliation is needed throughout the church. Not just the church within the continental United States, but it's also needed in the Dominican Republic and the places that we are as an Episcopal Church, Honduras ... and then repairing the breach.

When there's injury, when there's wounds of any type, we can't get along unless the wounds and the breach have been mended and repaired. That's what reparations mean. If we look at reparation theologically, it's to repair. For some reason we as Americans freak out about paying our way to repair the breach. We'll undo that. We want to skip that step, for some reason. But we as Christians, if we put Jesus at the center, we recognize that part of, not only becoming Beloved Community, but part of the piece of reconciling ourselves and all the way to what Bishop Smith was talking about in the public square, individually, interpersonally, is to repair the breach.

So what institutions and systems are broken? Which ones are broken? The brokenness of the health system affects us all. It affects the most vulnerable the most. The brokenness of the education system affects us all. But it affects the most vulnerable the most. I'm from Virginia. You all know the stories about Virginia and massive resistance and shutting the schools down around the state, and some counties shut down longer than others. And then one of those counties that was ... where there was a plaintiff from that county in the Brown vs. Board decision, a number of white folks started their own separate Christian academy. And folks paid and they went to those schools. Black kids couldn't go to school in that county, for years.

Now the story, the purpose of the story telling is that folks have been fired about the white kids, the poor white kids ... I don't mean poor like the "poor you" I'm talking about living in poverty, who were working class and their parents couldn't pay the tuition for them. There was a generation of white kids who were also vulnerable and they couldn't go to school. And so the state has had to make some reparations for that

generation of black, disproportionately impacted and a group, a smaller group of white generation of folks.

Now yes, mass incarceration has had a disproportionate impact on black and brown men and boys, but guess where the highest rate of incarceration, the highest increasing rate of incarceration lies? What population? I'm sorry?

Audience: Poor white?

Speaker 1: Women! Women in largely black and brown women, but also poor, low income, white women. You see that in places like Oklahoma. Just google NPR, Oklahoma and women in prison. Listen to that story, where the women are getting higher rates of incarceration, including the same crime compared to men because of this notion of women being on a pedestal as mothers and then if they do something that makes them not a good mother? The hammer comes down. Greater than or less a stampede.

So, we're trying to open our eyes to recognize that children, less than 18, they're still children and we have to recognize that. So how many times instead of calling them juveniles ... they're children and youth impacted by the juvenile justice system. Now if I can say that as a former prosecutor and defense attorney, then I know you can say it, because that's the truth. And believe it or not there are human rights conventions around the treating of children and the criminal justice system in the schools and we are not party to the treatment. And so, one of those is to call them children.

How many times have you said, "I'm going to go visit my juvenile nieces, nephews and grandchildren?" And don't you still consider your 17 or 18 year old a child? And yet we will sentence a 14 year old or a 17 year old or a 15 year old to prison and many times they will spend time, years sometimes, in isolation in an adult center. And then we know that they're going to be raped. But we ... but that's not true with his play. So we're looking at re-entry collaboratives and we're grounding it into formally incarcerated people returning to prison. And that includes children, folks, not just men and women. And one thing about the realities, as we're going to close this, in this part, the story NPR said that when one woman is incarcerated it impacts several women.

So here we have becoming the blood of community in the labyrinth. The invitation, where do I, where does my congregation, where do we as a diocese enter the labyrinth? And what work do we have to do within the labyrinth? It's not linear. There's no A, B, and there's no one way to enter the labyrinth. So as we close this, let us remember the words that Bishop Curry said in the beginning. He said, in speaking of Cain he said, one of

his insights then, was that a moment of crisis is always, always a moment of decision. It was true then, and it's true now. Where do we go from here? Chaos? Indifference? Avoidance? Business as usual? Or Beloved Community?

And as we grapple with this, again I challenge us to follow the guidance of your diocesan bishop, Bishop Smith and our presiding bishop, Bishop Curry, putting Jesus at the center, in meditating on the life and the words of Jesus, in focusing particularly on the loving, liberating, and life-giving way, and then too, be not afraid. Love one another as I have loved you.

Thank you and I look forward to joining you a little later.