

Sermon – “Uncontainable Spirit” 5-20-18

Pause and reflect...

Once upon a time there was a spring of cool, clear and refreshing water found on an open hillside. People would come from miles around to drink from the water and they would go away satisfied. The water was so good that they would tell their friends and neighbors to come and drink. More and more people came and soon there was always a crowd around the fountain. Some people began to complain that they would get sunstroke waiting on hot days or soaked on rainy ones. So a canopy was erected over the fountain. Then some people found it inconvenient to bend over to lift up the water to drink so the fountain spring was encased in stone and drinking faucets provided. More and more people came and the canopy no longer allowed them all in so a permanent building was erected with enough room for as many people as would come and more besides. People began putting pictures on the walls. Others spent much money beautifying the stone building and the drinking fountain with gold and jewels. Those who had given much started to demand special rights and privileges to the water and decided to charge others to drink from the fountain. Special guardians and keepers of the fountain with special garments and insignia were called to keep the people orderly and obedient...and soon the focus shifted from the water to the gathering place. People began to forget that there was a fountain at all in the hustle and bustle of the assembly. Then the fountain went dry.

People of God we can get caught in the pomp and circumstance of the church, standing on ceremony without remembering the reason we have come together in the first place. I enjoyed watching the Royal Wedding yesterday – if I have to say who’s wedding then you probably weren’t caught up Marriage Mania of the last few weeks. When Prince Harry of England married Meghan Markle at St George’s Chapel the whole world was watching. An

American Actress married a British Prince – not totally out of the ordinary, it's happened before. But what is unique is Ms. Markle, now Duchess of Sussex is bi-racial, which for the first time ever doesn't seem to matter in the hierarchy of the British Royalty. She also had been married before, which certainly would have made a difference in the past – but it didn't yesterday! Some might say: "What is the Monarchy coming to, others might see it as movement and growth.

I enjoyed watching the pomp and circumstance of the ceremony or I should say the worship service – because it certainly was a service of faith involving a wedding. Any wedding can get lost in the details, and when one is royalty it is a guaranteed experience. But this wedding ultimately was a service of faith, an expression of love between these two people and the rest of the world. Ms. Markle and Prince Harry were able to incorporate a blend of traditional and cultural in the service – there was wonderful music, a wonderful message by Bishop Michael Curry who is the current presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in the United States, who happens to be African American. There were various religious leaders giving up prayers and then the wonderful special music. This service and this marriage went against the norm or the tradition of the Crown and the Church of England but it was more inclusive than any other of the past.

As we come together on this Pentecost Sunday, we do so because of the diversity in the Spirit that brings us here. We come here to this Sanctuary for the desire of "living water" given to us at our baptisms. We could get caught up the pomp and circumstance or tradition or building better buildings to "house or contain" the living water that springs up like NEW life here in this place. St George's Chapel, where the Duke and Duchess of Sussex were married yesterday is beautiful and magnificent – but when it comes down to it – it is just brick and mortar – and stained glass – all of which is beautiful – is really just temporary. Our sanctuary is a place

of worship, a place to experience together and receive the grace of God in the waters of Baptism, the bread and wine of communion – the fellowship in the Holy Spirit of God who joins us together as the Body of Christ – but this also temporary – the love of God is everlasting.

Pentecost is when we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus. The Spirit of God bears witness to Jesus. The Spirit empowers us to be witnesses of God's Love – everlasting love. One of my seminary professors said this to my class right before graduation from Seminary -he said: *"Don't be more concerned about the programs of the congregation, than the spiritual condition of the people in the congregation, be a shepherd of souls rather than a manager of money and or director of activities."* We are a place of Ministry – a Spiritual Center unlike any other of the daily options available. When we drift away from this understanding and worry more about buildings, committees, whether we should stand or kneel, what color to paint this room or that room or even the new Sign that we NEED – we lose sight about what's important.

Theologian Carl Braaten stated; *"Without the primitive Spirit of Pentecost we are way down in the valley of dry bones and the breath we use to chant the liturgy or preach the sermon will not have the power to make those dry bones live again."* Where the Spirit is, there is life and growth; where the Spirit is not, is usually something we are trying to force. The Spirit cannot be contained or quantified like a cheer at a football game – We got Spirit, yes we do, we go Spirit how about you? That's really just about yelling the loudest.

This week there was a word illusion that was puzzling and popular to many.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/05/dont-rest-on-your-laurels/560483/> One of the more interesting things to come out of the yanny/laurel debate was the discovery that, by changing the pitch of the recording, you could adjust what you heard. In general, people heard

yanny more consistently when the pitch was lower and laurel when the pitch was higher. So, if we have difficulty discerning these two words how do we discern the Holy Spirit?

A New Yorker cartoon shows Two Zen monks in robes and shaved heads, one young, one old, sitting side by side cross-legged on the floor. The younger one is looking somewhat quizzically at the older one, who is turned toward him and saying: “Nothing happens next. This is it.”

Often times when we think of the Holy Spirit, there is an expectation that something specific will happen and if “Nothing” happens in the way it should, we don’t think that the Spirit is working or we aren’t filled with the Spirit or maybe we aren’t preparing for the Spirit in the right way. Maybe the right way is a way that is unexpected and catches us when we least expect it. One can till the ground and fertilize the soil and plant the seeds but that isn’t a guarantee that anything will grow, or grow as fast as one would like. Sometimes our experience of the Holy Spirit is just about being in the dirt. When our expectations of what the Holy Spirit is supposed to look or sound like gets in the way of experiencing it we have missed an opportunity to connect with God, and one another or ourselves.

Many of you often say you “can’t” meditate but what does that mean? Meditation is about an intentional, human activity which is NOT about trying to improve yourself or get anywhere else, but is simply about realizing where you are already! Letting go of expectations is taking an insightful step toward being able to encounter what is here right now. *“So, in meditation practice, the best way to get somewhere is to let go of trying to get anywhere at all.”* (Kabat-Zinn, Jon. Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation In Everyday Life (Kindle Locations 282-289). Hachette Books. Kindle Edition.) ,

There is no controlling or quantifying the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit is a promise made and a promise kept – An Advocate for support, for caring, for loving, for inspiration when we least expect it. Letting go and “being” = helps discern the Spirit of God, our Advocate in this world! Amen.