

Pentecost Sunday

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Christ Church Episcopal Savannah, GA

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When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. When the day of the wedding had come, the British royals and American celebrities were all together in one place. And suddenly, from the pulpit, there came a voice proclaiming the redemptive power of Love, and it filled the entire church where they were sitting.

Do y'all see where I am going with this? If you were any where near a television, computer or smart phone yesterday, you could not miss the fact that Great Britain's dashing Prince Harry married the beautiful American actress, Meghan Markle. And it felt like the world rejoiced. The royal marriage was a really big deal, historically speaking. And instead of downplaying the revolutionary aspects of the union, the couple celebrated them. And I might note, they used liturgy to do so!

As the New York Times put it, “*Prince Harry, who is sixth in line for the throne, has long called on Britain’s monarchy to draw closer to the daily life of its people. But the most extraordinary thing he has done is to marry Ms. Markle, an American actress who is three years his senior, biracial, divorced and vocal about her views. Their choices at the wedding, many of them heavily influenced by black culture, made clear they plan to project a more inclusive monarchy.*”

I am very happy that Harry and Meghan are creating a union that defies generations of racial oppression. However, I can't say that I caught royal wedding fever beforehand. For me, this past week was busy and exhausting, and the royal wedding seemed, literally, miles away. But I have been very excited that Bishop Curry was chosen as the preacher, and I had no doubt he would preach the Gospel quite effectively.

Because Bishop Curry is for real. He has been a faithful servant of God for many, many years. I have seen it with my own eyes, and we have experienced his pastoral care as a family when he was our Bishop in North Carolina. Unlike the stars that shine so brightly on the cover of *People* magazine one day and fade away the next, I know the hours, days, months and years that Bishop Curry has spent doing the behind the scenes, day-to-day, hands-on, non-glamorous work of ministry: studying, praying, sitting in countless boring meetings, driving himself to multiple visitations, being a husband and father, responding to endless complex pastoral situations, and on and on.

Bishop Curry has spent a lifetime striving to be the person God created him to be. And therefore, I had no doubt that he was ready to preach a royal wedding— piece of cake! (no pun intended) But to my utter surprise and delight, yesterday at Windsor Castle, in the midst of a Royal wedding, **the world experienced Pentecost**. A sermon about God's all-powerful and redeeming love broke through the suffocating tradition to a world weary with division, oppression, greed and violence. The Holy Spirit moved and Bishop Curry was a beautiful

vessel. The revolutionary wedding was the headline of most news sources yesterday, and Bishop Curry's sermon in particular seemed to have made a huge impact. How exciting!

Today we celebrate the Day of Pentecost. We hear the action-packed account from the Book of Acts. The disciples have just **let go** of the Ascending Jesus. Once again, they are left alone, waiting and wondering what happens next. Suddenly, a rush of violent wind fills the entire house—and tongues of fire descend on each disciple. When Peter and the disciples feel the overwhelming presence of God's Spirit, they are compelled to speak in new languages. And they are immediately understood by the diverse crowd of Jews gathered in Jerusalem for the Harvest festival. Some bystanders are cynical—accusing the disciples of being drunk. However, Peter is ready. Peter has been through the entire Jesus event, body, mind and spirit. Peter has even experienced the utter humiliation of denying his friendship with Jesus in the terrifying face of Roman executioners. **Peter has been formed and shaped, beaten down and raised up life, by the journey of faith, and he is ready.** When the Holy Spirit decides to move, Peter is a beautiful vessel. He proclaims the connection of what is happening right here, right now, to the words of the prophet, Joel. In this way, Peter interprets what is happening in the present through the spiritual foundations of the past. And yesterday, Bishop Curry followed Peter's lead, creating yet another day of Pentecost.

Just as Peter called upon the words of the prophet, Joel, Bishop Curry called upon the words of the prophet, Dr. Martin Luther King: *We must discover the power of love, the redemptive power of love, and when we do that, we will make of this old world a new world.*

And God's Spirit moved among the crowds gathered. No longer was the royal wedding another pop culture event. No longer was the royal wedding another State event. Instead, Bishop Curry's reinterpretation of love through the lens of the black American experience, through the lens of slavery and civil rights, through the lens of Jesus' death by crucifixion, reclaimed the love of the glamorous young couple as an icon of divine love and the wedding became a spiritual event. So, the Good News on this Day of Pentecost, is that the Holy Spirit is still on the move. In fact, the Spirit of God has the power to upstage George Clooney and Oprah Winfrey!

And what is our take home? Well, we can know that as followers of Jesus, we, too, are called to be beautiful vessels of the Holy Spirit. We are called to let our lives prepare us—to embrace our own failures and suffering, to let go when we must do so, to be faithful in the daily tasks of work, prayer, play, community and rest. To strive to understand the Gospel through the lens of our own life experience. And when the Holy Spirit moves through us, we will be ready to witness to others. We will have the vision to see that what is happening here and now is connected to the love of God, even in the darkest moments.

Bishop Curry spoke yesterday of the American slaves who in the midst of their brutal captivity were able to sing, "*There is a Balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole.*" The final verse says, "*If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus, and say, 'he died for all.'*" The message is this: the self-sacrificial love of Jesus is more powerful than any evil barriers we humans can construct—and by sharing the story of this love, in our own honest ways, we help to make this old world a new world. We may not be called to preach at Windsor Castle. But on this day of Pentecost, we celebrate that we, too, are called to be beautiful vessels of the Holy Spirit. As we connect the raw material of our lives to the self-

giving love of Jesus, we are compelled to share the vision of a new heaven, and a new Earth with a hurting and hungry world. And we see from yesterday, folks are indeed listening. Amen.