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John 15:26-27;16:4b-15

Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:24-35

Romans 8:22-27

May 20, 2018

The Day of Pentecost

I am not sure how many of you were as crazy as I was yesterday morning but I set my alarm for 4am so that I could get up and watch every minute of the Royal Wedding. I watched the crowds gathering, the guests arriving, the cheers and the excitement. As awe inspiring as it all was, I was more eager to hear our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry preach at this particular wedding. To witness the religious intersection of our Episcopal denomination with that of the Church of England.

To be sure, I had a professional curiosity to see how it would play out. But I also was deeply curious to see how Bishop Curry would handle the complex convergence of nationality, race, and social customs.

I watched the faces of the wedding guests closely as the cameras panned over them, as Bishop Curry raised his voice and leaned over the lectern as he so often does. To his credit, he tried to stay calm, cool, and collected but it's Bishop Curry after all and his excitement can never be contained for too long. His voice started to rise, his eyes lit up, his arms started to reach out as he proclaimed loud and clear the message of redemption and justice like only he can. I am not sure the proper Brits quite knew what to do.

Bishop Curry, in my opinion and I am sure in many of yours, is one of the most inspirational and dynamic preachers of our time and he never misses an opportunity to charge his listeners with living as he describes as "Jesus followers." Those committed individuals who take the Gospel and use it to change the world. But, he doesn't talk about change in the abstract – he talks about change through the power of love. And yesterday morning, his energy filled St. George's Chapel with an impassioned plea to use our love for God, for one another, and for ourselves to recreate this world we live in.

He said, "There's power in love. There's power in love to help and heal when nothing else can. There's power in love, to lift up and liberate when nothing else will. There's power in love to show us the way to live."

And what better message than today, on Pentecost Sunday when Acts, quoting the prophet Joel, reminds us that this love, this Spirit was poured out upon all flesh. Notice this – it was not sprinkled or splashed but poured out in abundance – not for a few select folks, the in crowd or a certain nation, race, gender or income group, but everyone and I don't have to tell you who all that includes because you hear me preach it week after week. But the text tells us that not only was the Spirit out but that God came down like a rushing wind to be among each and every one of us – so that those from every nation and every language might know this life-

giving love. Because this is the Spirit that leads us in the way of Jesus. That's the power Bishop Curry is talking about.

This Spirit that Pentecost teaches – It brings forth a love that challenges, a love that heals, a love that calls forth action within us. Acts says that when the Spirit descends upon us, we will see visions and dream dreams. Maybe that sounds a bit magical to you. All this talk about love and visions and dreams. I kept wondering this week why that is – why we might read these texts with hesitation, why this kind of love seems so other-worldly.

Maybe this kind of love is so hard to grasp because we have over-sentimentalized love to the point that we think it only works if it's easy. So when the chips are down, when the road gets rough – we often think this can't be love. We have made love into a romantic idealized image of ease.

But, when we put it in the context of the Holy Spirit, that live-giving, redemptive love that embodies each of us – we quickly learn something. The Spirit doesn't come to solve problems for us. That's not love. Instead, the Spirit that is poured out on us invites us to see the possibilities before us. The Spirit doesn't make the path easy, it makes the path possible. It helps us recreate the world by overcoming the challenges put in front of us. The Spirit gives us the visions and the dreams to follow Jesus. That's the power of God's love. We are equipped. We are empowered.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 describes the work of the Spirit this way:

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the **Spirit** in our hearts as a pledge.

I want you to notice the wording. God makes a *pledge* for our future through the work of the Holy Spirit. That is the path. That is the equipping and empowering work that is going on within us. God is entrusting us to do the work he has gifted us to do. Now, the Greek word for pledge is "arrhabon" which is also translated as guarantee or installment.

Let me give you two other ways these two verses could be translated...

NIV

21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us,
22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his **Spirit** in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

NRSV

21 But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us,
22 by putting his seal on us and giving us his **Spirit** in our hearts as a first installment.

What's interesting about this word "arrhabon" is that it implies a type of fiscal transaction, a down payment of sorts with the understanding that the full payment will be made in the future.

God is making a payment through the Spirit on our behalf. A payment that enlivens us with spiritual gifts so that God's vision becomes our vision, and God's dream becomes our dream.

1 Corinthians reminds us:

*4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷**To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.***

Gifts that call us forth to work (hear this) for the good of others. That's what Pentecost is all about. Love that is given forth in you for one another.

In fact, Chapter 13, verse 1 warns, *"If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."* In other words, if our gifts are only for ourselves, they are no good at all. The Spirit doesn't pour down on us so that we can pat ourselves on the back and live an easy life. The Spirit pours down on us to make a difference in this world, to not be complacent but to be dynamic followers of Jesus.

One of professors in seminary, Christopher Morse states in his book, **Not Every Spirit**, that *"Life in the Spirit is freedom to act with a purpose and a mission that serves the common good. In such freedom of human agency faith indeed works, love labors, and hope remains steadfast."*

That is the power of the Spirit. That is the power of love. But, it leaves us with this question...What has God gifted you to do?

Because, remember the Spirit was poured out on every single person – you can't run from it. You have been equipped and empowered. Now, it's time to seek the vision and dream the dreams to allow your gift to change this world. God put that down payment of love on you for a purpose. Imagine what that purpose might be.

Regarding your purpose, Bishop Curry said it best yesterday...

Imagine a world where love is the way. Imagine our homes and families when love is the way. Imagine neighborhoods and communities where love is the way. Imagine governments and nations where love is the way. Imagine business and commerce when love is the way. Imagine this tired old world when love is the way.

When love is the way, unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive, when love is the way, then no child will go to bed hungry in this world ever again. When love is the way, we will let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness like an ever-flowing brook. When love is the way, poverty will become history. When love is the way, the Earth will be a sanctuary. When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields, down by the riverside, to study war no more ...My brothers and sisters, that's a new heaven, a new Earth, a new world, a new human family.

Amen.