

Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21

Virginia Urbanek

If you live on this planet you know that yesterday was the BIG day for Prince Harry and Meghan Markel. I was up early and put off my sermon writing so I could see the royal pomp and circumstance, check out her wedding dress, AND hear Bishop Curry preach. Michael Curry is our Presiding Bishop and we, as Episcopalians, are kind of proud of him. We trusted that he would deliver (from the news commentaries so far, I think it is safe to say that he did deliver. Every news outlet re-posted his sermon on "the Power of Love" One neat tweet I saw from England said "the preacher is doing 50 in a 30 mph zone"). With his superb sermon he put pressure on Episcopal preachers everywhere, because not two minutes after the wedding the ENS posted. *If you like what you heard, come to an Episcopal church to hear more of the same* – if you came today to hear Michael Curry, I am sorry, you get me. I'm not sure Michael Curry and I are quite the same, but we do love the same Jesus.

Bishop Curry took 13 minutes to bring love and Jesus (apparently he was supposed to only have 4) to this big party. And bring it he did. He began with the phrase from Song of Solomon 8: 6-7 (chosen by the couple) "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for Love is stronger than death....many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it." With those words he impressed on the bride and groom the love, the stronger than death commitment of marriage. Then, he proceeded to talk *Gospel*, that powerful message of Jesus and Love. He wondered what the world would be if we could harness love in the same way we have harnessed fire, noting that the harnessing of fire brought about the Iron Age, the industrial Revolution. What could we do if we harnessed the power of love? If we lived lives animated by love?

The Bishop's sermon followed the choir singing a very traditional choral anthem, *If Ye Love me, Keep my Commandments* by Thomas Tallis, a composer from the 1500s. If you have been listening in church the past 4 or 5 Sundays, the words might have sounded familiar, for that anthem was based on John's Gospel which we have been studying. "If you love me, keep my commandments and I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may abide in you forever." The anthem leads right into today's celebration of Pentecost and today's Gospel.

Once again the Gospel is part of Jesus' farewell discourse. Jesus' leave taking reminds me of a song we used to sing at Wellington School "I don't want to say good-bye, I don't want today to end" When we have trouble with our own leave taking it is reassuring to know that even Jesus had a hard time. But Jesus promises his disciples that they will not be alone...he will send them a Comforter, an Advocate, a defense attorney, someone who will walk beside them and stand up for them, someone who will help them preach, and live the Gospel. That

Advocate is the one anyone who is worth their salt and stands in a pulpit has called on. "Come Holy Spirit, fill me with your power, your words" This power is not just for preachers. Anyone who is honest about testifying about Jesus, whether it is from a pulpit, in the laundromat, on the street corner, in the privacy of someone's kitchen, knows that you never do it on your own, something more powerful than self enables you to speak the words of the Gospel.

That is what happens in the Acts lesson. Acts is the record of the early church, of what happens after the Ascension. In the Gospel Jesus says "when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth...he (the Spirit) will take what is mine and declare it to you" If I had been one of those 12 disciples I might have thought, "Nice thought Jesus, but really how is this going to work? What do you mean by Spirit of Truth?" And then sitting in a room with friends with Jesus gone, the wind comes... the tongues of fire, and the speaking so that everyone could understand. The disciples must have been awestruck or as the British say "gobsmacked" What the....? We all know the power of the wind...wind was present at the very beginning of the book of Genesis, increasingly we know more about its power for both good and destruction. It dries out a muddy field, blows dust everywhere, brings destruction in a hurricane, makes electricity on top of the hill in Oakfield. It moves air and temperature on the jet stream, carries the seeds of both food and weeds from one field to another. It can spook you out if you are at home alone, or in this church, but it can also make you humble knowing that there is power greater than self.

First the wind, and then Peter, the one who denied Jesus, the one who was afraid to walk on water when Jesus called him, feels this wind, feels this power and stands up to preach. The Spirit of Truth was there.....everyone who was there, no matter their nationality heard the message. It was indeed a great miracle that everyone heard in their own language, but even greater that everyone heard what they needed to hear. For me, it is important that it goes beyond language...as it turns out everyone I preach to speaks English. What is important for me is that everyone hears the Gospel message, hears of the love of Jesus that is to permeate our lives. My prayer is always that the Spirit of Truth comes to each of you, that you hear in the way that you need, that you hear the message of a God who is with you, who knows and understands you and loves you.

When Peter preached it was the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, a time of spring harvest 50 days after Passover. Before the Christian church celebrated the day of Pentecost, it was an ancient OT Testament holy day. And because it was, the city of Jerusalem was filled with people, Jewish people from every land and nation (cudos to the reader of the first lesson). What a setting, what a captive audience. Peter preached and the wind of the spirit carried the seed and planted it. The event was a marvelous intertwining of the Hebrew scriptures and the new message of Jesus. It was the fulfillment of Jesus promise. The disciples are not alone; they have an advocate, someone who stands beside them and carries the message, one who actually "abides" in them, lives in them. This Gospel message

of Jesus is not static; it is moving; it is full of life; it is always the right message for all people for all times (not always the same, but always right).

And now back to yesterday... Bishop Curry was given the same opportunity as St. Peter, an opportunity that just "landed in his lap" He was preaching in front of a world wide audience (bigger than the crowded city of Jerusalem), a world that needed to hear that in Jesus there is love, not a wishy washy love, but a love filled with power and fire. He was preaching a message that contradicted so much of the war and hate in our world, a love that breaks down barriers. It was a message that points to a new world view in which an American (divorced and bi-racial) becomes part of the British royal family. It was a message preached by a black man whose ancestors were slaves, for a bride whose ancestors were also slaves. If you think that this message of love was not needed and heard and did not resonate in the hearts and minds of people, then you have not listened to the commentators and read the posts of that sermon. The message was not about Michael Curry (lest we get too proud), anymore than it was about St. Peter, both of these human men were placed in a time and place with folks who needed the message of Jesus' limitless love for all people. As Bishop Michael said "When love is the way there is plenty good room for all God's children" Yesterday did not end with the reception, with the parties, with the smiles and the waves, indeed the compliments for our Bishop, it continues on with the wind, the power given to us as well.

"If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus, you can say he died for all" The message of Jesus' love is given to you. It abides in you. It lives in you. You have the power. Preach it. Live it.

