

May 20, 2018
The Day of Pentecost
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St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT

Ezekiel 37:1-14
Psalm 104:25-35, 37
Acts 2:1-21
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

“We must discover the power of love, the redemptive power of love.
And when we discover that, we will be able to make of this old world a new world.
Love is the only way.”¹

Please be seated.

Perhaps, like me, you heard those words of Martin Luther King, voiced by Michael Curry, yesterday morning at around 7:20 a.m.

I'm not an Anglophile, so I hadn't planned to watch the “royal wedding.” In fact, it was completely off my radar screen—until the announcement a week before that Michael Curry would preach.

In case you're new to the Episcopal Church, here are two points of explanation.

First, the Most Rev. Michael Curry is the Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church. You might say that my boss is Bishop Ian of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, and Bishop Michael is his boss. The Presiding Bishop is elected by clergy and lay folks from across the Church. Michael is the first black person to hold that position.

Second, the Episcopal Church is the American arm of the Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church. Episcopalians are Anglicans. Metaphorically, the Church of England is a parent, all the Anglican churches around the world are children—and the Episcopal Church is a particularly unruly child. The Episcopal Church has caused parental headaches for the Church of England, particularly when it comes to issues of sexuality.

Michael is always a fine preacher, and he has a consistent preaching agenda. Yesterday Michael was true to form; he preached a great sermon, and he preached about love and justice. If there was a surprise, it arrived *after* his sermon: an outpouring of adulation that lit up the Internet.

Guess what: it's suddenly kind of hip to be an Episcopalian!

In a way, the storybook wedding had a storybook ending, though the ending came from a different book: the church nerds are suddenly the cool kids on the block. One of our own represented, and now the world knows: we are the kids who can saunter into any room and take charge, the ones who are adventuresome and creative and fearless, the ones who pull from old and new and borrowed and blue, crafting a whole that is more than any part.

I was very tempted to just play Michael's sermon for you this morning. But that's too much like cheating. So I'll just say this: if you haven't watched it, watch it. And if you have, watch it again. If you don't understand the hullabaloo, read some articles explaining it—goodness knows, they're everywhere. Finally, ponder this: what does that hullabaloo have to do with us?

There couldn't be a better day for us to be having this conversation. Bishop Curry likes to call us "the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement." Today is the Day of Pentecost, the day we celebrate the day 2000 years ago when the Jesus movement was born.

Acts tells us that the disciples were all together when it happened suddenly: there was "a sound like the rush of a violent wind" and "Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them." The author assures us that the disciples weren't filled with new wine.

They didn't need new wine. They had something much more powerful than that, something they didn't even have to imbibe. The Holy Spirit took them by the shoulders, gave them a great big wake-up shake, and then turned them loose.

Maybe today is the day the Holy Spirit will do that with you. Maybe she already has done that with you. I can tell you, it's been happening a lot lately, right here, with people sitting in these pews. Sometimes she gives a shake, but more often she's usually pretty gentle with regular people like us. She arrives with a whisper in the ear or a tap on the shoulder. But she's there nonetheless, just as Jesus promised, showing up exactly when we need her most.

And need here we do.

Racism is real. Poverty is real. Violence is real.

Love is real.

And we're the cool kids who get to go tell everyone else.

Hopefully this fanfare will follow Bishop Michael around for a while. The next big thing on his plate is coming up on Thursday. That's when he'll be in Washington, D.C., with other Christian leaders for a big gathering in support of a joint declaration they called *Reclaiming Jesus: A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis*.²

Their declaration begins with this: “We are living through perilous and polarizing times as a nation, with a dangerous crisis of moral and political leadership at the highest levels of our government and in our churches. We believe the soul of the nation and the integrity of faith are now at stake.” It also says that, when the church’s role “is undermined by political leadership, faith leaders must stand up and speak out.”

Last week, Bishop Michael issued a press release with Jim Wallis of Sojourner’s, saying this:

... the declaration called *Reclaiming Jesus: A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis* ... has been commended to the churches by a group of elders from across the traditions of our Christian families. Conceived and discerned during an Ash Wednesday retreat, written and prayed over during Lent, announced to some colleagues and a few publications at Easter, it will finally be launched to the churches at Pentecost—when the early Christians took their faith to the streets in the public square.

I work up this morning to learn that “Bishop Michael Curry” showed up last night on the “Weekend Update” segment of Saturday Night Live. You know someone is a cultural icon when they get an avatar on SNL. Yes, we are the cool kids on the block.

We live at an incredible historical moment, in an amazing geographical location. There is so much creative work being done here in greater New Haven. Local government and nonprofits are open to partnering with congregations of faith to imagine and create the world that Michael Curry spoke about. The solutions to the problems in our communities—racism, poverty, violence—it’s not about a lack of ability. It’s about a lack of will. We have to find the way. And the way is love.

Yesterday was a great day to be a liturgy nerd. Today is a great day to be an Episcopalian. Every day is a great day to be a Christian. I think I’m ready to stand up and speak out. Are you?

Again quoting MLK,

“We must discover the power of love, the redemptive power of love.
And when we discover that, we will be able to make of this old world a new world.
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Notes

¹ The text and video of Michael Curry’s sermon is available from the Episcopal New Service online at <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2018/05/19/video-text-presiding-bishops-royal-wedding-sermon/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

² This is available online at www.reclaimingjesus.org (accessed May 20, 2018).