

Going where the Spirit sends us.

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I wonder what they were waiting for? I wonder what they expected to happen? No I'm not talking about the royal family wondering what Michael Curry was going to say, I'm talking about the disciples, all of the followers that had gathered in that upper room. Forty days after the resurrection Jesus ascended into heaven and, as was said in Luke, they were told to wait in Jerusalem. Jesus told them they would be equipped with power from on high. In the reading from John for today he promises them an advocate. They have been waiting for something, they didn't know what.

This may be an example of be careful what you pray for, you just might get it! Think of the surprise that was in store for them. Now today's reading in Acts speaks of the bafflement, surprise and disbelief of those who saw the result of this outpouring of the Spirit. Nothing is said about what those disciples thought. Have you ever wondered what it was like for them?

Note the words chosen to describe the event. Something like tongues of fire, something like the sound of a rushing wind. The words something like give us the hint that this was something so outside of normal that there are no words to describe what was experienced. The best they could do was to say it was something like and then fill in the blank.

They had been promised an advocate a companion, but they did not know what was going to appear. In John the advocate is literally "one called alongside." The promise of the Spirit, the advocate, in John is not about comfort, but about challenge; the challenge to come out from behind the locked doors and get out into the world. This was the start of something big!

The Jewish festival of Pentecost celebrates the abundant gifts of God to the people of Israel. This thank offering was a giving back to God a portion of what God had given to them. Very much like our prayer when I accept the gifts of this congregation and we say, "All things come of thee oh Lord and of thine own have we given thee." Israel acknowledges the abundance that God gives to them. It is also a celebration of the giving of the Torah, the Law to Moses. Jews remember on Pentecost all of the wonderful things God has done for them.

This also explains all of those people from all of those nations who were gathered in Jerusalem. That long list of names that makes most of our lectors either run for a pronunciation guide or call me for help. It is into this international

milieu that the Spirit bursts into in a most unexpected way causing chaos, consternation and joy.

There they sat in Jerusalem maybe behind locked doors worried about what the future would bring. Jesus had promised them they would not be left alone, but there they were probably feeling alone. Surrounded by those who disliked them, this tiny group wondered what in the world can we do? Does this sound familiar?

What is different is that the Spirit is a gift to all people, not just a small group. Now the Spirit is not something that God invented after the crucifixion. We hear echoes of Spirit in the first chapter of Genesis in the creation story where the breath of God passes over the face of the water. The breath the “pneuma” is how creation happens. In Genesis 1 God speaks and creation happens. God doesn’t make it with hands or anything else, but speaks the world, all of creation into existence. The sound of a rushing wind is reminiscent of several stories in the Hebrew Scriptures in particular the story of Elijah both when God appears to Elijah and when Elijah is taken up to heaven.

The breath of God also shows up in our reading from Ezekiel in the Valley of the Dry Bones. Again in this story it is the breath the pneuma that causes the bones to come together and flesh to come upon them. Then a second time Ezekiel is told to prophesy to the breath and the breath enters the bodies of the slain. The passage ends with the promise that God will put his spirit into the slain and they will return to their lands. This Spirit has been around from the very start, but the disciples experience in a very real and overwhelming way.

The whole focus of Pentecost is not just the giving of the Spirit, but is really about spreading the Gospel. That is why it is so appropriate to acknowledge our Christian Formation volunteers and our Education for Ministry graduates on this day.

EfM is not just a class in the Bible, Church history and theology, but a preparation for ministry. Hence the title Education for Ministry. One of the important things a fourth year student prays about is what is next. Some hesitate to sign up because they somehow think this is preparation to go to seminary or become a deacon. Now it is great preparation for that. It certainly made my first year at seminary much easier having completed all four years. The graduating person though needs to ask, “Where do I go from here? What will I do with all that I have learned and experienced.”

Christian Formation that stops at our door is not what the gospel tells us to do. It is not what the Spirit asks us to do. Bill Seeley often decorates the mantle in the Hospitality Room. Just this week he changed it for the season after Pentecost. Interestingly enough he put an oil lamp with a basket partially covering it as part of his decoration. As he was doing this I was talking to him and he said, “Well we have to remember not to put our light under a basket.”

And there is the real problem for our church in the national sense as well as the local. This is what Michael Curry is all about, spreading the word of what he has called the Jesus movement. When he preached and spoke at the Evangelism Matters conference he reminded us that many of us aren't even comfortable saying Jesus. He had us practice. Sadly he is right. We have allowed others to hijack Jesus into someone who does not resemble my image of the Son of God, the Prince of Peace the ultimate expression of God's love for us.

Many of you may know that Bishop Curry preached at the royal wedding Saturday morning and among my online world a sermon Bingo card was circulating. It contained many of the phrases that Michael uses in most of his sermons and this is something that I think the disciples may have known as well.

Here are a couple of them: Jesus Movement, Beloved Child of God, Called to follow Jesus, I'm almost done, Loving, liberating life-giving God, If it's not about love it's not about God, GO!, there is a balm in Gilead and finally my favorite God didn't put you on this earth just to use up oxygen!

Now if you watched the wedding you know that several of them were used. What struck me was that he focused on the primary gospel message of Love. Ultimately that is the message we are all called to take out into the world. This is what Pentecost is ultimately about. Taking that gift of love and going out into a world that desperately needs that message of God's unconditional love.

There is something else though another opportunity for us. We know what the Episcopal Church is and what we believe and stand for. However there are so many out there who do not know about us. Yesterday 2 billion people around the world watched this wedding and now have at least a clue what Episcopal is. When Wendy walks around campus she often is asked what Episcopal is. Is it Protestant, sometimes she is even asked are you Christian? I'm absolutely serious we have a serious message problem, but with this wedding we have a unique window of opportunity to let people know who we are.

So if you are talking to friends about the wedding, make sure they know who Michael Curry is and who we are. Tell them that if they liked his message maybe they should check us out! I have one friend that ordered a banner for his church that said, "Thank you Harry and Meghan for having our bishop preach at your wedding." That provides the opportunity to let people know that message is what we preach in our church all the time.

For Bishop's Curry's message is the message of the gospel that was let loose on the world at Pentecost. It is the message that we carry into the world and the world really needs that message right now. Michael's message is also one where he is constantly sending us out. So go this Pentecost into the world rejoicing in

the power of the Spirit and sharing Jesus' message of the unconditional love of God.