

Sermon – Feast of Pentecost – St Thomas Bellerose & St Elisabeth Floral Park

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

An extraordinary thing occurred yesterday. Prince Harry and Megan Markle were married of course in St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle. A billion or so people from around the world watched what I thought was a very moving celebration of the marriage of two people. Not your average wedding of course. Within the service our own Presiding Bishop, The Most Revd. Michael Curry preached the word of God to probably the largest audience he had ever stood before. The symbolism was powerful.

If you watched it I hope Bishop Curry's words sank in and if you didn't I'd encourage you to watch it. Many of the guests interviewed after the service commented on his words and his message that love is a powerful force akin to fire. Our presiding bishop is a man who can hardly contain the energy and power of the gospel when he preaches and talks with people. His deep love of God and Jesus Christ just oozes out of him and the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in him with intensity.

His reflection on the passage of scripture from Song of Solomon was powerful. Many of you would have heard clergy preach on this passage at weddings before. Just when I thought he was coming to the end of his sermon, he did as he nearly always does and introduced one new idea. Fire!

Bishop Curry referenced an idea proffered by the 20th century Jesuit scholar Pierre Teilhard De Chardin. De Chardin said, "The day will come when, after harnessing space, the winds, the tides, and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire."

Our Bishop was linking together the power of love to transform the world with the power of fire that transformed the world when it was unleashed by early civilizations as they first harnessed the energy of a spark.

True love was unleashed on the world by God in creation but it was in Jesus Christ that we truly come to understand how love is the embodiment of God, and how God is the embodiment of love. Jesus birth, life and death, was a pivot point in human history that changed the course of the world just like fire, and continues through us, the body of Christ, to change the world for the better.

Today we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, the day when God sent the Holy Spirit in tongues of fire to be with all people with open hearts. Today also marks the pivot point of our liturgical year. As we move into time between Pentecost and Advent we are reminded how the first Jesus followers came together to form communities of faith and wrestled with a new way of being in the world. It is a wrestling that is also manifest in our lives as we too come together as a community of faith in a world of selfish endeavor.

Pentecost marks the arrival of the winds of change that brought the Holy Spirit in tongues of fire to all nations. The disciples had once again gathered together in one place when suddenly from heaven came a great sound like the rush of a violent wind. The sound was so loud the whole city of Jerusalem heard it.

The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit in a way that was different to when Jesus breathed on them when he appeared to them after his resurrection. This time the disciples could speak in languages unknown to them before. It allowed them to be understood by the many foreigners residing in Jerusalem.

The events of that morning all those years ago split the crowd between those with curious minds and those with skeptical minds. Peter had to rise to address the crowd to correct an assumption that the disciples were drunk. He reminded them that the prophet Joel had predicted the day when God would pour out the Spirit upon all flesh and that each would prophesy. No one was to miss out and even the slaves and women, considered non-persons, were to be beneficiaries of God's saving grace in sending the Holy Spirit for all.

God's plan for the salvation of the world required that Jesus message of justice, love and hope had to be taken out to the world. The disciples not only needed the skill of linguistics but also need an inner spirit to reside within them as they faced up to the difficult work that lay ahead. God's plan then, and now the mission of our church, is to restore all people to unity with God through Jesus Christ. It started on that morning and now we carry on this mission powered by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was the antithesis of the pagan view of life and someone who challenged the prevailing worldview centered on selfish endeavor. He sought to form communities of faith, centered on the primary commandment to love God, to love our neighbors and to love ourselves.

Jesus' ministry was all about changing people's hearts and challenging power structures. He was about seeing, touching and communing with the powerless – women, foreigners and refugees, the sick, the disabled, the lepers and slaves. He went out of his way to listen to them and restore them to wholeness and dignity.

The Holy Spirit that came upon those folks all those years ago comes upon us at our baptisms. The Holy Spirit is sealed within us at that sacramental and holy moment and we are initiated into the community of the body of Christ. Together we magnify the Holy Spirit in the community and the world.

The apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthian community reminds them that the Holy Spirit was given to them to activate their individual gifts for the common good. We each have gifts to share no matter who we are at any one time in our lives. We are all baptized into the one body and we are all sealed with the one spirit.

The Holy Spirit binds us together in community and becomes for us our advocate and guide, a comforter for the difficult way of life. The spirit of God continues to pour out in

the world. As we live and work and worship together we do it for God and the common good. This sentiment extends to the global community so that the common good is for all.

Lifting communities out of poverty both here and overseas is for the common good. Feeding everyone and ensuring communities have clean water to drink is for the common good. Ending racist behavior and violence, and caring for displaced persons whether here or overseas is for the common good of humanity.

The common good is our Christian ethic and the Holy Spirit empowers us to constantly work toward making a better world for all, not just some. Let us not succumb to selfish endeavor and competition that leaves us feeling great when so many others get discarded and trampled on. Jesus showed us how to live and how to care for each other in community, especially the weak and the displaced.

When we contemplate our own experience of the Holy Spirit acting within us we can trace the power of God calling us to serve and to minister to the other who is created in the image of God. We are called upon to reflect on the power of the Holy Spirit within us. Is the fire burning within you?

Fire can either be a gentle flame or a powerful force. The fire of the Holy Spirit comes upon us but it can be perplexing to discern how Jesus is calling us to serve. God has a plan for each of us and the Holy Spirit working within us is a key part of this plan. All flames start gently before becoming greater powers. The fire of the Holy Spirit is no different.

I want to leave you with these words from Pierre Teilhard De Chardin as he speaks of the patient trust required to know how God is leading you and this church, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Patient Trust*

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through
some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,

as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances
acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

Amen.

(* - From De Chardins Hearts of Fire)