

Today is one of my absolute favorite holy-days of the Christian year. I do love Christmas, with the birth of the baby Jesus, the story of a tiny human born in a stable who would save lives, change hearts and challenge the status quo. And I love Easter with the mystery of the empty tomb, the light of hope and the testimony that not even death can stop the message of love. But Pentecost has a special place in my heart. And it's not just because it gives me an excuse to play with fire. I love that the holy spirit shows up when the disciples are gathered together. This isn't a private encounter for one person or even the most inner circle of the 12 apostles. I love the power of the holy spirit in this text. A sound, like the rush of a violent wind, a sound so great that it fills the entire house. The spirit shows up not as a gentle dove as it does when Jesus is baptized, but with tongues like fire that rest upon each of them. But the spirit isn't done yet. I also love that this encounter is not for the benefit of the disciples, to make them feel comforted or more spiritually connected. Instead, the spirit shows up and fills them up in such a way that they are emboldened to leave the safety of the house where they are gathered and to share the story of Jesus with anyone in earshot. I also love that they given the ability to speak in the languages of those who are listening, languages from all over the known world. All the barriers of sharing the good news have been shattered. *Everyone* can hear and understand the message of God's love that was embodied in Jesus.

While *I* may love Pentecost, the love for Pentecost hasn't quite reached the mainstream, even among Christians. In fact, I did an internet search for the word "Pentecost" and the second result was an article from Patheos titled "What is Pentecost? Why does it matter?"¹ And the second entry was a blog post simply called "What is the day of Pentecost?"²

When I commissioned my first tattoo, I wanted a dove that represented the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. (I told you I love Pentecost!) I found a tattoo artist in Seattle whose bio said she enjoyed tattooing religious art. I reached out to her and sent her a few inspiration images and told her I wanted a dove that hinted at the fire of Pentecost and

¹ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/what-is-pentecost-why-does-it-matter/>

² <https://www.gotquestions.org/day-Pentecost.html>

specially specified that I did NOT want the peace dove with an olive branch from the Noah story. I showed up for my appointment and my artist was so excited about the design, she had actually created two options, which she told me she rarely does. She laid them out on the counter and sure enough, olive branches. I politely and gently said that the drawings for beautiful, but they were not what I asked for and reminded her that I wanted a Pentecost dove. She looked at me somewhat bewildered and said “I don’t know what that is.” With a little google searching I was able to show her what I meant but I was somewhat surprised that this artist who specialized in religious art was not familiar with Pentecost.

I have a few ideas about why Pentecost isn’t more popular. Primarily because the retailers haven’t decided to turn it into a reason to shop. We don’t give gifts or gather for a meal with family on Pentecost. There’s no tradition of decorating our homes with flames. There’s no Pentecost baskets to fill with chocolate. But I think there’s more to it than that. Pentecost is the one Christian holy day in which the focus is not about Jesus and his ministry. Instead, Pentecost is a story about our ministry. Pentecost calls **us** into action and to take risks for the sake of the gospel. Pentecost is the only Christian holy day that requires something of us. If we are to follow the example of the earliest disciples, those who knew and learned from Jesus, we are called to leave our metaphorical and literal safe places and follow the spirit’s leading to share the love of God with anyone and everyone within earshot.

I know this sounds like I am saying we should stand on the sidewalk and shout to our neighbors about Jesus. Or that you should print up a bunch of fliers about how awesome Jesus is and why people should be Christian. But that’s not what I am suggesting. I don’t think either of those things would be very helpful or purposeful. What I *am* suggesting, is that we open ourselves up to the immense power and creativity of God’s holy spirit and allow our imaginations to run wild with the possibilities of how our world, our country, our community, our family, ourselves, might be different if Jesus’ message of loving our neighbor’s as ourselves guided everything we did.

How many of you watched the royal wedding yesterday? The Rev. Michael Curry, an African-American preacher and presiding Bishop of the Episcopal church reminded the world of what can be possible when love is the way. For those of you who missed it, here is a sampling of what he said:

Love is not selfish and self-centered. Love can be sacrificial, and in so doing, becomes redemptive. And that way of unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive love changes lives, and it can change this world.

If you don't believe me, just stop and imagine. Think and imagine a world where love is the way.

Imagine our homes and families where love is the way.

Imagine our neighborhoods and communities where love is the way.

Imagine our governments and nations where love is the way.

Imagine business and commerce where this love is the way.

Imagine this tired old world where 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.

When love is the way, there's plenty good room - plenty good room - for all of God's children. Because when love is the way, we actually treat each other, well... like we are actually family.

When love is the way, we know that God is the source of us all, and we are brothers and sisters, children of God. My brothers and sisters, that's a new heaven, a new earth, a new world, a new human family.³

I was inspired and moved by Bishop Curry's sermon yesterday and if you haven't watched it, I highly recommend it. Bishop Curry called on everyone in that church, everyone watching on television, everyone who would later read the transcript or watch the sermon online to imagine a new way. He didn't limit his call to only those in power, he didn't address the leaders of the world, he invited everyone to imagine. And this is

³ <https://www.esquire.com/lifestyle/a20759188/royal-wedding-sermon-full-transcript/>

Peter's message at the end of our text this morning when he quotes the prophet Isaiah saying "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my spirit and they shall prophesy." Old and young, men and women, slave and free – the message is that God gives everyone the ability to dream and imagine God's vision for the world.

Did you notice the shift in language about half way through Rev. Curry's sermon? Imagining is only the start. He starts speaking of WHEN. When love is the way, poverty will become history. When love is the way, we will put away our guns. There is no "IF" here, but WHEN. The assumption is that we can make this shift, we can take dreams and visions and imaginings and with the leading of the holy spirit, we can turn those dreams into reality.

Each of you should have received a strip of red fabric when you came in this morning. These pieces of fabric are intended to be stoles for each of you. The wearing of stoles has a long and rich history that I won't get into today. When clergy wear a stole it is a metaphor of many things. One of which is a yoke – like a yoke worn by cattle and oxen to aid in the plowing of fields or pulling a cart, the stole is a reminder that we are in service to God and doing God's work. Yokes make the work easier than working without them so we are reminding that we are not doing this work alone but with God and with each other. Stoles also remind us of the towel Jesus used when he washed the feet of his disciples on the night of his arrest. As he washed and dried their feet he instructed them to love one another. And so the stole reminds us that we are not only to be of service to each other, but to love one another. So I invite you, if you wish, to wear this stole today as a symbol of your calling to be a truth-teller, a love-sharer, an dreamer and a doer, empowered by the divine or simply by your desire to imagine a different way. And then I encourage you to keep your stole somewhere where you will notice it from time to time. Maybe in your home, hanging on the mirror of your car, in your office as a continual reminder of the power of God's transformative and powerful love set loose in the world and embodied in you. May it be so. Amen.