

**Message: Pentecost is a love story**

**Who watched the wedding of Prince Charles to Meghan Markle?**

It's an event that captured the world's attention. It's estimated that two billion people tuned in to watch the ceremony. Personal confession: I watched it. No, I didn't get up at 1:30 am, but I did record the ceremony and watched it yesterday afternoon.

**The event was both simple and complex.** At the heart of it, it's simply a love story. It's a wedding of two people who met and fell in love. Their relationship has a common core: they both care for others. That's something they share with many people. There was joy in the end. It touched hearts and minds around the world.

**The wedding was also the height of complexity,** given the celebrity and fame of the couple. Their family situations are complex. Cultural differences are broad. There were great crowds gathered just to catch a glimpse of the couple. There were misunderstandings and surprises. There were entrances and rites, hats and morning suits, carriages and bulletproof sedans.

**Today, we gather to celebrate another event that captured the world's attention.** We're gathered to celebrate the day of Pentecost. The word means “fiftieth” in Greek. It happened fifty days after Easter, on a Jewish festival day. It's the day when Jesus' promise was fulfilled. The Holy Spirit came down, filling Jesus' disciples and forever changing the way we live.

**The day is both simple and complex.** At the heart of it, it's a love story. It's a covenant, a wedding if you will, between Jesus and the people who love him. Our relationship has a common core: we love and care for others. That's something we share with all who believe in God.

**Pentecost is also the height of complexity,** given the nature of the people involved – us. Our family situations are complex and challenging. Our cultural differences are broad. There were great crowds gathered on that first Pentecost. There were misunderstandings and surprises. There was joy in the end. And it continues to touch hearts and minds around the world.

**What’s amazing is the fact that Jesus told us what was going to happen – in advance!** The passages we read from John 15 & 16 earlier give us Jesus’ words. He said them to the disciples on the last night he was with them. Jesus made a promise. His promise is something for them to hold on when things get complex.

**Jesus said,** *“I’ve told you these things to prepare you for rough times ahead ... so that when the time comes and they start in on you, you’ll be well-warned and ready for them.*

*I didn’t tell you this earlier because I was with you every day. But now I’m on my way to the One who sent me. Not one of you has asked, ‘Where are you going?’ Instead, the longer I’ve talked, the sadder you’ve become. So let me say it again, this truth: It’s better for you that I leave. If I don’t leave, the Friend, [the Spirit of the Truth,] won’t come. But if I go, I’ll send him to you. [...]*

*I still have many things to tell you, but you can’t handle them now. But when the Friend comes, the Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is. He won’t draw attention to himself, but will make sense out of what is about to happen and, indeed, out of all that I have done and said”* (John 16:4-15, The Message).

**The words Jesus spoke then are words for us to hear today.**

**Jesus gives us encouragement with a promise.** He ascended to heaven so that we could receive God’s Spirit, who is a Spirit of the truth, the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit certainly made an entrance that day with the sound of a rushing wind, tongues of flame over the disciples’ heads and the gift of speaking in tongues, so that everyone in the large crowd gathered could hear the good news of Jesus Christ and his love in their own, native language. The same Spirit is present today.

**The truth is that Jesus came to bring us together in love.** Jesus didn’t come to judge and condemn us, but to redeem us. Jesus came to restore our relationship with God. Jesus is still at work in the world today through the Holy Spirit. It’s a work with us. After all, the Spirit came to live inside of us, working behind the scenes. That’s a gift, an advantage that we have. It’s a gift that wasn’t available before Jesus sent the Spirit. It’s God’s way of equipping us for whatever we face.

**No matter what may happen to us or to the church, we’re called to a higher purpose: to love God and share that love with others.** That means embracing God’s love in the midst of the complexity and foolishness of the world. That means having a heart for those who are marginalized and oppressed: the strangers in our lands, the orphans and the widows. That’s means loving one another and welcoming the diversity of all who live, regardless of their gender, race, orientation, beliefs, abilities or limitations. There’s another way to live. It’s the way of love and grace, not rules and laws.

**Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to show the world that it’s misled.**

He said, “[the Spirit will] expose the error of the godless world’s view of sin, righteousness, and judgment: [the Spirit will] show them that their refusal to believe in me is their basic sin; that righteousness comes from above, where I am with the Father, out of their sight and control; that judgment takes place as the ruler of this godless world is brought to trial and convicted” (vv8-11).

**Jesus is saying that the world is wrong about three things.** First, if we refuse to believe Jesus came to save us, then we’re headed down the wrong path. Jesus offers life and light to our soul in a unique way. He is the God of love and forgiveness, willing to accept us no matter what. There is no other path like his. Second, the only way we can be right with God is for God to initiate the relationship. The good news is that God did so. That’s why Jesus came to earth. We delude ourselves when we put our limited view and will at the center of the universe. There’s so much more beyond our sight and our ability to control than we can imagine. Let’s give up our desire to control and let God be in control. Third, we’re not the ones who are up for judgment. God judges the things of this world – lies, violence and love of idols. Those beliefs and behaviors lead us on a path of darkness and death, away from God. Let’s hate the sin and love the sinner.

**Jesus came and gave his life for us to redeem us.** God loved us so much that God acted to save us, even though we reject, deny and do violence to the Spirit of Truth Jesus sent us. We have forgotten our first, true love: Jesus. Jesus loves us. Jesus wants to change us, to give us a new life, one that will give us joy and a purpose. Jesus wants us to share

the spiritual gifts we receive with others. There’s much more to it, but that’s the beginning of a new life.

**The day of Pentecost is also a day of truth.** It’s the day the world began to change. The first assembly of Spirit-filled believers began to live into the mission Jesus gave: to go and make disciples. The disciples standing before them were proof, witnesses to the power of Christ to change lives for the better. The Spirit was at work in a deeper way, touching hearts and minds at a level beyond words. Jesus’ movement continues in, with and through us by God’s love and grace.

**The way hasn’t been easy since then.** The church has grown large. It isn’t united. Harm has been done in Jesus’ name. Cultures have changed. The world is struggling to find purpose and meaning in a society based on consumption. People feel alone, even when they’re in the presence of family and friends. Violence is increasing, even violence against children. Life seems to have less value.

**I invite you to embrace the simplicity of Pentecost.** God is present and at work in the world. When we believe and accept Jesus, we become one of God’s ambassadors. We’re sent out into the world to spread God’s love by what we say, think and do. That must be first, ahead of politics, laws or our own desires. That’s how we change.

**The best part?** We don’t go alone. Jesus sends his Spirit. The Spirit reveals to us the way God is present. We can find joy and peace because our hearts are strangely warmed. We know we’re God’s children. We’re loved. We can trust God. We know that God will help us with our weakness. We’re set free from the darkness that limits and binds us. We’re saved in hope. And that gives us the steadiness and patience we need to live today, tomorrow and for all of eternity.

**Abraham took his sandals off** when he approached the burning bush because he was in the presence of God, who is holy. We, too, are made holy when we are in God’s presence for the purpose of honoring and glorifying God. Accept Jesus and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit makes us holy, from the inside out. God gives us what we need to be holy at home, holy as we go from place to place, holy at work

and holy in those places we would rather not go. Let's put aside the mundane and embrace the holiness within us and others.

**I invite you to be made holy.** Believe in Jesus and ask for forgiveness. Let the Holy Spirit transform you, so you can live a life worth having.

Let us pray ...

*Lord, help us to be open and willing to receive your love today. Refresh and renew our spirits by your Spirit, which fills us with the spiritual power and energy we need to live as your children. Help us to be changed by your love so we are filled with joy and we can't wait to share the reason why with others. Help us to give ourselves to others in faith so they will know your love and have hope. Let us drink deeply from your river of living water in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15 (CEB)**

When the Companion comes, whom I will send from the Father - the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father - he will testify about me. You will testify too, because you have been with me from the beginning. [...] But I have said these things to you so that when their time comes, you will remember that I told you about them.

I didn't say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go away to the one who sent me. None of you ask me, 'Where are you going?' Yet because I have said these things to you, you are filled with sorrow. I assure you that it is better for you that I go away. If I don't go away, the Companion won't come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will show the world it was wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment. He will show the world it was wrong about sin because they don't believe in me. He will show the world it was wrong about righteousness because I'm going to the Father and you won't see me anymore. He will show the world it was wrong about judgment because this world's ruler stands condemned.

I have much more to say to you, but you can't handle it now. However, when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you in all truth. He won't speak on his own, but will say whatever he hears and will proclaim to you what is to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and proclaim it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine. That's why I said that the Spirit takes what is mine and will proclaim it to you.

**Romans 8:22-27 (CEB)**

We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. And it's not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see? But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it with patience.

In the same way, the Spirit comes to help our weakness. We don't know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans. The one who searches hearts knows how the Spirit thinks, because he pleads for the saints, consistent with God's will.