

Said by Martin Luther King Jr. in 1957, and quoted yesterday in a sermon by the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal [Anglican] Church of the United States, Michael Curry,
"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."
 In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, AMEN +

Good morning. I expect that those words may be familiar to some of you after watching yesterday's telecast of the royal wedding! As we celebrate TODAY the Day of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, and the gift of the Holy Spirit to us, we also celebrate the task given to us: to show and tell of the love of God. And to love one another, every one.

Last Sunday Fr John reviewed for us the events we have been observing in this first half of the church year, now winding up: the story of God in Jesus, coming to us and teaching us and saving us. And finally, dying, rising and leaving to be with God above. From here in until next Advent we'll think and pray more about how to live our lives with and for God. But today – we wear red, to remember that last step promised by Jesus, the coming of the Holy Spirit 2000 years ago, after Jesus had gone up to the Father and left the men and women who loved him.

You have heard and read today, a blend of the various descriptions of that first Pentecost. The story may be pretty familiar to you: there were the disciples, gathered, waiting ... for the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, promised to them by their beloved Jesus, now that he would no longer be with them in his body. But what happened? The Spirit did come – in a way that does not exactly sound comforting at all. We read in Acts that the earth shook, the wind blew, tongues of fire descended. A truly dramatic event ... with a very great deal of what can only be called disruption.

And disruption is exactly what also marked the rest of their lives after that day ... all the disciples went on to face struggle and persecution. They travelled to faraway places, and many of them eventually were martyred for their actions in faith. They bore witness to an amazing truth, and many, many people came to know God through their efforts -- but in worldly terms they surely paid a price. They were not alone. God was with them, just as they had been promised. But their lives certainly were never the same. Had they not been "commissioned" – given a task and the authority to do it – and sent to go share the good news, they could, as someone has said, have "savoured the truth of the resurrection for themselves, cherishing the pleasant memory of Jesus' resurrected presence into their ripe old age". But that didn't happen for them.

That day of wind and fire was the very first birthday of the “church”, and its mission was clear, to go out and to tell others the good news of God and God’s love shown to us through Jesus.

But now we are the church. It’s our turn. And why should we expect anything different? Should we not expect the Holy Spirit to bring challenges and opportunities to us, too – good but difficult challenges? For sharing the good news at great cost is not something that ended hundreds of years ago. People like Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the 1940s, Martin Luther King Jr in the 1960s, and many persecuted Christians today, show us this.

Of course, most of us will never face physical danger on account of our faith. But for us, too, the Holy Spirit doesn’t magically solve our problems, or give us a quiet life, but instead gives us an assurance of God’s presence, a courage, that can help us, in our personal hard times; and, as well, to reach out to others in faith. Rather than settle the turbulence of life, the Spirit helps us keep going forward. Life is, as a saying goes, just one thing after another; and no matter how young or old, fast or slow, strong or frail we may be, we keep going in the way we can. For this is the very same Spirit given to Jesus at his Baptism, which immediately drove him into the wilderness. He was given courage, and we are, too.

God creates, and loves, and reaches out to his beloved creation. And we are sent to help with that, in our very own lives. And like those apostles, there will always be something small or big that we can be doing for God and neighbour, to show the love of God.

A book has been written about a doctor who has devoted his life to improve the health of people in very poor countries – whose philosophy is summed up in a Haitian proverb that teaches that, in this life and world, when you solve one problem, there is always another one waiting for you: what the proverb calls *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. In other words, for him, disruption is just the way life is, if you live it trying to help others, trying to do work for God. And with each mountain, each challenge – God the Holy Spirit is there to help you see the possibilities! So that for this man, his mission is not a burden, but a gift.

But now I am at last getting to what we all need to think through in this time, and in this place, St Mark’s. Let’s consider our situation. We are starting a new chapter and have consciously taken on efforts to continue the long presence and service of St Mark’s to the neighbourhood in future years. We too are disciples, given a job to do for God. But – the command to go and make disciples does not say: go and make (or even maintain) a building of bricks and mortar. Those apostles went out with no purse, no shoes, nothing ... Is this

idea, given at Pentecost, of going and making disciples even compatible with worrying about a physical presence for the church?

To answer that, one of the classic questions we must face is, what is the church? There are several possible answers. It is people. Or, to the world, it is a place. where people do what church people do. I suppose we need to think about what this place means, what it adds, both to us and to the neighbourhood around us. Well, it seems to me that the answer to why we are rooted here – why people may feel rooted wherever they are – has a lot to do with what we are.

We are children of God, every person is; and we are made of both body and spirit. That's how we even know each other at all in this life. So, physical presence matters. And the people whom God puts in our path, in our neighbourhood, see us and this place and what it stands for. And even if it's not part of their daily lives, many, many are glad this place is here and open and active. The recent open house brought people through the doors whose faces lit up with the beauty and quiet and prayerfulness they saw here. The decades of community support here have made a huge difference to so many people. Our activity and presence here might not take us to faraway lands like the apostles, but they certainly take us to our neighbours, especially when our doors and hearts are open.

It is a place we come together to try to make the world a better place. It is a place that encourages us and where together as a community we know that God is with us. As brothers and sisters, together.

It is a place where, underlying everything, all that helping of others and of each other is made possible by our prayer and worship and sacraments.

So let's rejoice in the presence of the Holy Spirit, who challenges and comforts and walks beside us. Let's let others know, too. And let's love others and make of this old world a new world. Amen.