

**“Guided by the Spirit” – John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15 – May 20, 2018**

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The past few days have been full of newsworthy events. If you're a fan of horse racing, which is almost a prerequisite for going to seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, like me, you'll know that yesterday the colt named Justify won the Preakness Stakes, the second leg of the Triple Crown. Justify won the Kentucky Derby two weeks ago, and he goes on to race at the Belmont States.

Four days ago, while the president was in a round table meeting with other leaders in California to discuss the so-called “sanctuary laws,” he went off script and referred to immigrants coming into the U.S. from Mexico as animals. Since then, there have been numerous attempts to clarify that the language used was to specifically target the criminal element, though opponents to the characterization state that calling any human an animal is against the belief that all people are created in the image of God, and the command of Christ to love all people – no exceptions.

Additionally, in other news, there was a royal wedding – after six months of preparations, Prince Harry married Megan Markle in a spectacle that was witnessed around the world in real-time via satellite coverage. But in addition to the happy couple and the parade of spectacular hats, the surprising bit of news from the wedding was the 14-minute sermon given by African-American Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry. His powerful message on love, and I'm not talking about romantic love, but the kind that Jesus preached, while a bit unexpected at a royal wedding, was a much-needed word in our world's troubled times.

And of course, the other bit of news was the school shooting that occurred on Friday morning in Sante Fe, Texas. 10 people were killed. 13 were injured. The suspect, a 17-year-old student, was arrested, and he confessed to the shootings. Once again, the halls where our young people and educators should feel safe, were stained with the blood of the innocent.

So with all this news in mind – maybe not so much the horse race – I have been contemplating the message of Pentecost. Pentecost is the day on the church calendar when we tend to mostly focus on the work of God the Holy Spirit. The story in the Book of Acts, of the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples in a rush of wind and tongues of flame, give us our Pentecost symbols and colors. But this time we will look at the Holy Spirit as spoken by Jesus to his disciples, through the lens of the gospel of John. Remember, these words from Jesus to his disciples come on the night of the Last Supper before he would be arrested and soon after, crucified.

In John's gospel, we hear the Greek word "paraclete" used to describe the Holy Spirit. Translated, paraclete literally means, one who walks alongside. It is related to a Greek verb that means to call alongside. So Jesus is conferring the understanding to his disciples, that once he is gone, he will call on the Holy Spirit to be with, or walk next to them. One commentator referred to this as sort of a Trinitarian Tag-Team – Jesus leaves, but the Spirit takes his place with the disciples.

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And according to this passage, the Holy Spirit's role in the world is to teach the world what is wrong, to convict the world of what is right, and to tell the good news. And when we allow the Spirit to work in us, to live out what Christ has called us to be in the world – and that is a continuation of the message of what Jesus has been telling his disciples throughout his ministry, but also reminding them in this long discourse on the night of his arrest – to love – when we let the Spirit work in us, we can carry out Christ's command. And repeating what I've been saying the past few weeks, and echoing the message that Bishop Curry preached at the royal wedding yesterday, the love that Jesus is talking about is not a sentimental feeling, it is an active love that sees others as God sees them.

It is a love that stands against the powers of the world that would have us put ourselves first, no matter who gets trampled along the way. It is a love that goes against the systems that are in place in the world that neglect the rights of those who are stuck out on the margins so that those who are part of the "in crowd" get way more than their fair share of the world's resources. The world has adopted the mentality of "survival of the fittest" – that those with the most power will always dominate. But while that might be important concept in the animal world, human beings are not animals.

Jesus tells us in this passage that the Holy Spirit will remind the world of what is wrong. Sin is wrong, taking advantage of others is wrong, hoarding resources and wealth is wrong, ignoring others who are weaker and in need is wrong. When we let the Spirit act as the Paraclete – the one who is called to walk alongside us – then we too will help spread that message of what is wrong in this world, and we will stand up for peace and justice and human rights and compassion for all humans. If we followers of Christ don't speak up, if we are unwilling to challenge those who are claiming false truths in the name of God, then who will? If we don't call out those who twist scripture in order to advance their agenda of hate, then who will?

It is when we make this message of the gospel heard, that the Spirit is able to carry out the Spirit's second function, upholding the truth of God's righteousness, standing firm in God's

call to loving action, instead of turning a blind eye. There are those in power, those that have a platform, those who have convinced others that they are right – that are corrupting the message of the gospel. Anyone who promotes hate, anyone who disregards the innate worth of any other person, anyone who advances violence – they have missed the message of Christ’s good news.

But here is the hope – Christ has already won. The powers of evil in the world have been defeated. Love wins. Every time justice is promoted. Love wins. Any time hatred is vanquished. Love wins. Any time those on the margin are given a voice and are heard. Love wins. And our hope comes in the power of the Holy Spirit through Christ. In him we have been given the assurance that one day, the kingdom of God and the message of Jesus Christ will be fully realized. Not today, not tomorrow, but one day.