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CMCL
Acts 2:1-13
Reflection on Pentecost Parrot Pinning

So, a little something happened this weekend, between the printing of this bulletin on Friday and our following it in worship this morning. You might have heard about it – it’s been planned for months, and a billion or so people around the world watched it, they say.

The “little something” was the wedding of Prince Harry, of the British royal family, and his American fiancée, Meghan Markle. And I confess I watched it. (As a Mennonite, I think I’m contractually obligated to use the verb “confess” to accompany that sentence).

Mostly I watched it because it was an absolutely great time with my mom – fresh pot of tea, cucumber sandwiches, and all. We’d watched Princess Diana’s wedding together as well, at a similarly ungodly hour, with her mother more than two decades ago, so it was a sweet repeat.

But I also watched it because I have a bit of a fascination with Meghan Markle and all she symbolizes. When I was pregnant with Annali, mom and I also watched television together in the darkness of a night. That time, we glued to a screen watching votes roll in across the country saying that Barack Obama had won his first term as President of the United States. I felt a surge of hope and optimism, so excited for the birth of my daughter months ahead, and of the significance of a biracial, African-American President for our country, and for the little person inside me.

And I felt, if not hope and optimism, at least a sense of joyful wonder, as I watched a biracial, African-American woman become a princess yesterday, too. Don’t get me wrong, becoming President or a princess are both fates that I absolutely would not wish upon my own biracial, African-American daughters, and yet, it was also powerfully moving to see such long-held barriers bulldozed in such public ways, and by two such winsome individuals each time.

But, in the midst of these insanely surreal times, when the place you find yourself hearing Gospel preached, and the seeing the most segregated setting in the world (church) integrated in such intentional, unapologetic ways, is in a multi-million dollar (1) celebrity/aristocracy-laden ceremony put on by the same (pardon my British) bloody monarchy that played such a foundational role in so many continuing injustices around the globe – well, you have to stop and listen in wonder. Let’s be honest, Meghan Markle brought it together, both by being the reason for the wedding (the outsider being joined to the royal family in the ceremony), but also in the primary planning and selection of the content and participants, no doubt. But if even the British royals are allowing – no, showcasing this kind of Gospel, where is the rest of the worldwide church????

And so I did listen in wonder – because that wedding was a church service, as evidenced by the baffled looks on the faces of many attenders, who clearly weren’t expecting it. And the preacher, the presiding bishop of the US Episcopal Church Most Reverend Michael B. Curry PREACHED. He preached about LOVE AND FIRE.

He preached about the importance of love as Jesus preached it and showed it. That all the law comes down to this: that you love God, and love others, and so, presumably, also yourself

He preached about the power of love as MLK, Jr. preached it and showed it. For “we must discover the power of love, the redemptive power of love. And when we do that, we will make of this old world a new world, for love is the only way.”

He preached about the strength of love as lyrically penned in the Song of Solomon. For love is strong as death, as fierce as the grave. Its flashes as flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.

And he encouraged everyone to bring just as much passion and intelligence and innovation to harnessing the power of love (in service to one another and the world) as humans have put into harnessing the power of fire (in service to our own convenience), saying that the harnessing of love would be even more revolutionary than that of fire.

And so, dearly beloved CMCLers – especially you who have just turned 50, and you who’ve already been slaying the over 50 box. We’ve been saying every year in this ritual that you’ve got the fire – the Pentecostal (yes, Pentecost means 50) fire. And the embodiment of the Holy Spirit, who came on Pentecost as fire, as envisioned by this congregation, is an audacious, expressive, colorful, not-good-at-hiding-demurely parrot. Thus the parrot pins.

And I can testify that I see it in you ...

You’ve toed your lines,

You’ve followed your rules,

You’ve sacrificed much,

You’ve trod delicately the minefield(s) between the generation before you and the one after,

You’ve chosen words carefully,

and you’re kind of done putting your flames under a bushel; done doing things just because you’re supposed to.

You’re in a stage of life when you’re discovering you can get away with that in new and, yes, powerful, ways.

And we want to bless that -- bless the journeys that have gotten you through these decades. Bless the love that you have lavished on vocations, causes, loved ones.

But we also want to bless the fire that wants to burn in you – burn away the chaff that has likely taken up too much of your life. We want to bless the divine fire that wants to ignite the rich oil that has built up over the years in the very vessel that is you – the divine fire that wants to be a blazing, dancing flame of light in the world.

We want to bless the wisdom you have accrued – some just with the passing of time, but likely much with the pains of trial and error, failure and success, intention and serendipity.

We want you to be reminded of the very same words of blessing at Jesus’ baptism, on this Pentecost where we celebrate the baptism of the Holy Spirit: that you are a child of God. You are dearly beloved, and God delights in you and desires new life, new birth and new fire for you; new birth for you just as much now as the day of your baptism, just as much now as the day your parents

dedicated you in the company of their congregations.

The world needs your love and your fire;
just as much as we need the innocence and potential of our babes,
just as much as we need the curiosity and wide-open future of our fourth graders,
just as much as we need the critique and activism of our senior youth
just as much as our eldest members, from whose bonfires the sparks of our own
flames were launched, and whose wisdom and love literally anchor us.

If you just turned 50, or if you are any age over 50 and are new to CMCL or just never got a parrot pin, or if you're any age over 50 and lost your parrot pin, please come forward to receive one. Now I invite everyone over 50 to stand, where you are.

We celebrate the baptism of Christ's Spirit in your life, each day in all the moments--bitter and sweet—by giving you this parrot pin. You all, indeed, are wisdom's messengers to those around you, wherever you are. Please remain here to receive a prayer of blessing:

I will tell you what wisdom is and how she came to be
and I will hide no secrets from you,
but I will trace her course from the beginning of creation.
From everlasting she was firmly set from the beginning, before earth came into being.

There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy, clear, unpolluted, good, irresistible,
humane, free from anxiety, all powerful--for she is a breath of the power of God;
In every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God.
And it was a mark of insight to know whose gift she was.
O God of my ancestors and Lord of mercy,
give us the Wisdom that sits by your throne.

excerpts from the Wisdom of Solomon 6:22; 7: 22, 25, 27; 8: 21; 9: 1, 4)

(1) \$42.8 million (94% of which went to security costs),
<https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/18/the-royal-wedding-may-cost-43-million-and-94-percent-of-that-is-for-security.html>