

Thomas R. Cook
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota
9:00 and 11:15 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist
Pentecost; May 20, 2018

“About Love...”

Scripture: Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27; 16 4b-15; Pentecost B RCL

I've been waiting for the scandal to break from the recent Royal Wedding, ladies and gentlemen. And break it has! Scandalous headlines in the news, beyond even the groundbreaking, rule-breaking decisions of Meghan and Harry leading up to their wedding, beyond the gathering of the famous --- and notorious --- headline makers piled yesterday into St. George's Chapel, beyond the mixing of classes and races and nationalities, the scorching headline that grabs the limelight... **“American Presiding Bishop preaches over twelve minutes...”** My gosh, the Empire nearly came to its knees. The preacher went over twelve minutes! And that's not all; that headline continues... “American Presiding Bishop preaches over twelve minutes... **about love!”** Oh, my gosh...

Well, I say... It's about time. What else can we all truly have to offer, if not love? What else is the Presiding Bishop supposed to speak about?... and not because he's at a wedding. Really, when all is said and done, in this old world of trial and tribulation, a world of what seems like fleeting beauty but perpetual suffering, in the extraordinary inequalities that would seek to divide the human race and humankind

from the very care and goodness of the Creation, what else do we truly all have the capacity to offer each other if not... love?

We can, you know. I remember a time seventeen years ago when the United States was rocked to its core by an attack upon our sovereignty and our safety when the Towers in New York City were burned to the ground on 9/11. And not many days later, I sat in my car at an intersection, listening to the news, near unbelieving, broadcasting memorial service after memorial service from all around the world, myriad nations collectively pausing in an expression of shared grief with... us. Some of you will remember... Buckingham Palace played the *Star Spangled Banner* that day. Buckingham Palace! We fought a war against them. Palestinian leaders were photographed donating blood to send to the USA, Cuba offered us use of its airspace and medical assistance, the French news headlines read: “We are all Americans.”¹ And I sat in my car and listened to expressions of grief and condolence from all around the world, with tears rolling down my face, watching at least a little bit of love hold sway. How we human beings perpetrate such pain in this world, yet sometimes, sometimes we do rally for good. Even so, the moment was short-lived. Or maybe I should say... short-loved.

¹ Richburg, Keith; “After 9/11, Global Solidarity Short Lived”, The Washington Post, September 6, 2011.

The Presiding Bishop is right, you know. We've got to get love on the world stage for over twelve minutes. Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now..." Until now? That was some 2,000 years ago, and still we groan. A lot. But I am encouraged when our groaning leads us toward love. I heard a young woman yesterday, a high school kid from Santa Fe, who lived through the recent school shooting there say something like, "Guns aren't the only problem. I have to feel how sad, how hurt that guy had to be to want to do what he did." Or the police chief who gets pretty near the point when he says... "...The hatred being spewed in our country and the new norms we, so-called people of faith are accepting, is as much to blame for so much of the violence in our once pragmatic Nation."² He's right. With all the hatred being spewed out there, isn't it time we speak out with love?

The Presiding Bishop got it right. He could have gotten up in front of the world yesterday and said anything he wanted ---called for political upheaval, chastised the rich and famous, disparaged those with whom he differs--- but he is steeped and formed in the passion and love of Jesus, just as we are supposed to be, a love that is truly transforming, and I have to figure that what goes into his inspiration and his enthusiasm is the same Spirit that inspired another thing once said by the apostle Paul:

² Hennessy-Fiske, Molly, "Santa Fe, unlike Parkland, says the issues behind the latest school shooting isn't guns"; The Los Angeles Times, May 19, 2018.

“If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or clanging cymbal.” That’s it. Without love, it’s all just more noise.

So, I figure I’m at about four and a half minutes now, and if my boss the Presiding Bishop can go past twelve, I can keep it going just a little longer. If you have had the opportunity to see images from yesterday’s Royal Wedding, you likely saw a lot from St. George’s Chapel that looked familiar: the beautiful sanctuary with soaring ceiling and stained glass windows; the rows of people seated politely in worship or at least politely feigning a spiritual interest; the priests and ministers in their finery, the altar, and candles, and vergers, and such. It’s our Episcopal heritage. We’re a lot like that. *Yet, if we do not have love...*

But we do. Everything we do here is founded in love. Perhaps not always the love we would share, could share, dare I say, ought to be sharing, with others, but definitely a love that is already shared with us. When Jesus was preparing to leave his friends, he said some strange and esoteric things to them, things about... *“...when the Spirit, the Advocate, comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.”* What is he talking about?!? It seems so random, so not understandable; I completely get lost in that weirdness... until I think about it from the perspective of love. Until I

hear these words from the basis of God's unmitigated, unfathomable love for us. The Advocate, the Spirit, will prove the world wrong about sin... because through Jesus, we know that sin is not what is at our created core despite what a cynical world might suggest; nor will sin be held against us who trust in the Lord. Wrong about righteousness, because Jesus didn't need to succeed or be important to appear righteous in the eyes of the cynical leaders of this world, any more than we do. He just needed to love. No matter what the world would do to Jesus, and it did a lot, his destination was always assured; though he fail in the eyes of the world, he was bound to be with God the Father. Like we are. And the world is wrong about judgment, because while the world (even some Christians) seems to love condemnation, while we can so easily condemn one another, condemn the one with whom we disagree, believe we are condemned... it's not us who stand condemned in Christ, rather Jesus says it is the so-called "Ruler of this world", the one who sucks the life from it, the one who sows the seeds of evil and revels in it, the one who does not love. What is condemned in the presence of love is only that which chooses not to love.

Everything we do here ---greeting friends, rejoicing in music, hearing God's Word, welcoming and baptizing these children, praying for each other, a kind word to the sick or broken-hearted, a warm handshake or hug, a heart expanding to care more deeply for the needs of others... everything we do here is about love. Or it ought to be. The Presiding Bishop was right.

[Ask the sound engineer how long have I preached now? About 8 minutes? Maybe 9?] Okay, my time is done, but we have a job to do. I want to ask you to take the love from this time, take it out there, and make it last a lot longer than twelve minutes.