

Royal Wedding

Apart from “the dress” and “the kiss” the most talked about item on the recent wedding was the address by Bishop Michael Curry. Perhaps those of us who have heard Bishop John Spong were less surprised than many of the critics when he spoke passionately for 14 minutes. He had an audience estimated at 1.9billion – why would anyone pass up an opportunity like that?

He invoked Dr Martin Luther King at the start and asked us to *imagine* (not far from “*dream*”) and offered tantalising things which are worthy of wishing for.

So many great ideas begin in the imagination.

When I read the sermon carefully next day in *The Guardian*, I was even more impressed. Here it is in full – courtesy of *The Guardian*.

.....

And now in the name of our loving, liberating and life-giving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

From the Song of Solomon, in the Bible:

*Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;
for love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
a raging flame.
Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it.*

The late Dr Martin Luther King Jr once said, and I quote: “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, for love is the only way.”

There’s power in love. Don’t underestimate it. Don’t even over-sentimentalise it. There’s power – power in love. If you don’t believe me, think about a time when you first fell in love. The whole world seemed to centre around you and your beloved.

Oh, there’s power, power in love. Not just in its romantic forms, but any form, any shape of love. There’s a certain sense in which, when you are loved, and you know it, when someone cares for you, and you know it, when you love and you show it – it actually feels right. There’s something right about it.

There is something right about it. And there’s a reason for it. The reason has to do with the source. We were made by a power of love, and our lives

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were meant – and are meant – to be lived in that love. That’s why we are here.

Ultimately, the source of love is God himself: the source of all of our lives. There’s an old medieval poem that says: “Where true love is found, God himself is there.” The New Testament says it this way: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God, and those who love are born of God and know God. Those who do not love do not know God.” Why? “For God is love.” There’s power in love. There’s power in love to help and heal when nothing else can.

There’s power in love to lift up and liberate when nothing else will. There’s power in love to show us the way to live. Set me as a seal on your heart ... a seal on your arm, for love is as strong as death. But love is not only about a young couple. Now the power of love is demonstrated by the fact that we’re all here. Two young people fell in love, and we all showed up. But it’s not just for and about a young couple, who we rejoice with. It’s more than that.

Jesus of Nazareth on one occasion was asked by a lawyer to sum up the essence of the teachings of Moses, and he went back and he reached back into the Hebrew scriptures, to Deuteronomy and Leviticus, and Jesus said: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself.”

And then in Matthew’s version, he added, he said: “On these two, love of God and love of neighbour, hang all the law, all the prophets, everything that Moses wrote, everything in the holy prophets, everything in the scriptures, everything that God has been trying to tell the world ... Love God, love your neighbours, and while you’re at it, love yourself.”

Someone once said that Jesus began the most revolutionary movement in human history: a movement grounded in the unconditional love of God for the world – and a movement mandating people to live that love, and in so doing to change not only their lives, but the very life of the world itself. I’m talking about power. Real power. Power to change the world.

If you don’t believe me, well, there were some old slaves in America’s Antebellum South who

explained the dynamic power of love and why it has the power to transform. They explained it this way. They sang a spiritual, even in the midst of their captivity. It’s one that says, “There’s a balm in Gilead ...” a healing balm, something that can make things right.

“There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole,” and one of the stanzas actually explains why. They said:

*“If you cannot preach like Peter,
And you cannot pray like Paul,
You just tell the love of Jesus,
How he died to save us all.”*

Oh, that’s the balm in Gilead!

This way of love, it is the way of life. They got it. He died to save us all. He didn’t die for anything he could get out of it. Jesus did not get an honorary doctorate for dying. He didn’t – he wasn’t getting anything out of it. He gave up his life, he sacrificed his life, for the good of others, for the good of the other, for the wellbeing of the world ... for us.

That’s what love is. Love is not selfish and self-centred. Love can be sacrificial, and in so doing, becomes redemptive. And that way of unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive love changes lives, and it can change this world.

If you don’t believe me, just stop and imagine. Think and imagine a world where love is the way.

Imagine our homes and families where love is the way.
Imagine our neighbourhoods and communities where love is the way.
Imagine our governments and nations where love is the way.
Imagine business and commerce where this love is the way.
Imagine this tired old world where love is the way.

When love is the way – unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive.
When love is the way, then no child will go to bed hungry in this world ever again.
When love is the way, we will let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness like an ever flowing brook.
When love is the way, poverty will become

history.

When love is the way, the earth will be a sanctuary.

When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields, down by the riverside, to study war no more.

When love is the way, there's plenty good room – plenty good room – for all of God's children.

Because when love is the way, we actually treat each other, well ... like we are actually family.

When love is the way, we know that God is the source of us all, and we are brothers and sisters, children of God.

My brothers and sisters, that's a new heaven, a new earth, a new world, a new human family. And let me tell you something, old Solomon was right in the Old Testament: that's fire.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin – and with this I will sit down, we gotta get y'all married – French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was arguably one of the great minds, great spirits of the 20th century. Jesuit, Roman Catholic priest, a scientist, a scholar, a mystic.

In some of his writings, he said, from his scientific background as well as his theological one ... in some of his writings he said – as others have – that the discovery, or invention, or harnessing of fire was one of the great scientific and technological discoveries in all of human history.

Fire to a great extent made human civilisation possible. Fire made it possible to cook food and to provide sanitary ways of eating, which reduced the spread of disease in its time. Fire made it possible to heat warm environments and thereby made human migration around the world a possibility, even into colder climates.

Fire made it possible ... There was no Bronze Age without fire, no Iron Age without fire, no Industrial Revolution without fire. The advances of fire and technology are greatly dependent on the human ability and capacity to take fire and use it for human good.

Anybody get here in a car today? An automobile? Nod your heads if you did – I know there were some carriages. But those of us who came in cars, fire – controlled, harnessed fire – made that possible.

I know that the Bible says – and I believe it – that Jesus walked on the water. But I have to tell you, I did not walk across the Atlantic Ocean to get here. Controlled fire in that plane makes it possible.

Fire makes it possible for us to text and tweet and email and Instagram and Facebook and socially be dysfunctional with each other. Fire makes all of that possible, and de Chardin said fire was one of the greatest discoveries in all of human history. And he then went on to say that if humanity ever harnesses the energy of fire again, if humanity ever captures the energy of *love* – it will be the second time in history that we have discovered fire.

Dr King was right: we must discover love – the redemptive power of love. And when we do that, we will make of this old world, a new world.

My brother, my sister, God love you, God bless you, and may God hold us all in those almighty hands of love.

Anniversaries

We have been reminded recently that we have spent the last four years commemorating WWI; the tragedies, braveries, stupidities, sacrifices, and muddy hell that millions of people went through – (not to mention the effects on fatherless families in the aftermath) and I'm sure we have asked the question “for what?” It clearly wasn't a war to end all wars - if it had been maybe it would have been more worthwhile (or would it?)

However, the so-called Spanish 'flu killed more people than both World Wars put together. Strictly it should be called the *1918 flu pandemic* rather than blaming it on Spain, but maybe that was due to censorship of the press at the time.

It is worth pausing to think about it because it may well have spread so virulently due to the overcrowding in hospitals and poor living conditions of people in all parts of the world at that time. Huge movements of troops in wartime and immediately afterwards, have a parallel today with high rates of people moving around in cheap aeroplane flights to all quarters of the world.

Possibly the poor nourishment and exhaustion of troops and others had something to do with the ability of people to fight off the symptoms.

Today there is huge crowding in our cities – in 1900 there were 1.6 billion on the planet and mostly in rural areas, today 7.6 billion and mostly in cities.

It is important for the welfare of everyone that the needs of the most vulnerable are not overlooked, that decent housing and efficient sanitation is regarded as everyone's right and early access to medical help is evenly available.

Do we need to join Bishop Curry in dreaming about this or can we do something practical to achieve it?

We watch the handling of the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, remind ourselves that over 10 000 died of Ebola in 2014 in west Africa, and hope that the virus doesn't become airborne like the 1918 virus did.

Social Changes

Ireland has recently voted YES to a change in the law which gives women more control over their own bodies. The vote was an overwhelmingly clear indication of opinion (unlike the Brexit vote) but the age group of 65 and over voted NO.

In New Zealand the Parliament passed the same-sex marriage law in 2013 – without a plebiscite, but fully cognisant of public opinion.

The vote to legalise same-sex marriage in Australia came in 2017 after a voluntary postal survey in which almost 62% voted in favour.

Much opposition came from Christian churches and in February this year the Anglican Church's legislative body voted against a report that calls for continued opposition to same-sex marriage. Following the vote, some clergy said they "pressed the wrong button" as they were "confused" (asleep?)

I'm reminded that initially the Church of England was in full support of the slave trade also. The Quakers were first to voice opposition to the trade

in 1671 and the legislation for abolition came through in 1833 (with the exception "of the territories in the possession of the East India Company").

What is it about social change which makes it so hard? Is it just about hanging on to the past? Is it something to do with age (as in the Irish vote?) Is it a refusal to look at scripture in a new light?

I was delighted to learn that "turning the other cheek" was a suggestion by Jesus which would discredit the assailant if he struck the second blow – which would have had to be done with the back of the hand.

Many in Sea of Faith are involved at a personal level with all sorts of socially reforming movements; prison reform, against violence to men and women, access to education for the marginalised, refugee re-settlement, inter-faith movements, peace groups and so on.

Many of the social changes that occur start from the bottom up – the classic examples today are gay rights and anti-smoking – and so through the groups to which we belong and through which we dedicate time, money and emotional energy, we know that "if you can think it – it is possible".

I heard one Dunedin City Councillor saying that to achieve change, the most effective way was through politics – becoming a part of the system and being at the table to make the arguments and contribute to the votes at critical times.

Is that just for the younger people? (I know what the surveys say about the age of Sea of Faith members).

We are in winter recess with our meetings in Dunedin, but that mustn't stop us working towards bringing social justice *on earth as it is in heaven*.

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