

So a week ago, yesterday, Sarah and I were at a family wedding in Iowa, where my uncle presided, at least for the sermon and exchanging-of-vows portions of the service. It was his granddaughter getting married that day. Now John has been a pastor for 55 years. He's been around the ministry block with churches in Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, even as an interim out in California. It is more than safe to say that he has reached a point in his life, or in his career, in his ministry, that he is even less hesitant to throw out all the punches in the Gospel arsenal.

So, when it came to this particular sermon last Saturday, John was not about to give this cliché wedding homily. He immediately referenced this special ceremony taking place amidst a world filled with conflict over immigration, nuclear intimidation, as well as the flooding that was plaguing the surrounding communities of Iowa, leaving local farmers in the annual refrain of fear and worry over minimal crop yields. And then, soon enough, my uncle did something that we were taught in seminary never, ever to do. If we ever wanted to quote someone, even dare come close to stealing someone else's material, we better cite the source, just

like we were taught to do in high school, let alone any graduate level education.

Nevertheless, my uncle, The Reverend John Kerr, at fifty-plus years of ordained ministry, flat-out plagiarized another's sermon. It was from another wedding, in fact, one that took place at the most un-Iowa-like setting, with no offense intended to the Hawkeye state. It was given only six weeks before in St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle in England, where Prince Harry and Megan Markle were married. But with all due respect to Queen Elizabeth II and all the royal pomp and circumstance, it was The Most Rev. Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopalian Church here in the United States; he was the one who brought the whole royal house down for all the world to see, including for all of us preachers who were more than ready to steal his material for sermons upon sermons to come.

Now, I suppose I cannot blame my uncle too much, even if he didn't make his high school teachers proud by *not* citing his source. It's quite possible the majority of the family and friends gathered for the wedding in Iowa had a pretty good idea where those words came from

anyway. I also can't blame him because Bishop Curry was right, after all. This isn't a cliché love that a couple gets drawn into on a random Saturday, and share a smooch at the end of the service before going onto the honeymoon for marital bliss. This isn't just a high spirit-filled moment to just throw the *love* word around willy-nilly hundreds of times in an hour or so. This isn't just about the cute couple, at all.

“There is true power in love,” as Bishop Curry so pointed out, no matter how often we over-sentimentalize the word. So, if you need reminded what he said not just to Prince Harry and Megan, but to countless people watching all over the world...now I cannot do it full justice, but Bishop Curry and my uncle, too, proclaimed:

*Someone once said that Jesus began the most revolutionary movement in all of 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 some power, real power, power to change the world.*

*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.*

Yes, my uncle was more than right to steal such material, because with all due respect to The Most Rev. Michael Curry, he stole Jesus' material, just like we're all supposed to do. Because, as the reading in Ezekiel shows us, no matter how high-in-the-spirit moments we feel we experience, the Holy Spirit sends us forth to serve, not keep it inside.

Weddings are not just about making the couples feel special. It's about the love to the point you're willing to die for the other. It's about the love to keep after one another in being the best person for the sake of complete strangers. Baptism isn't about a spiritual high for the baptized and their family. It's about a tidal wave that's gonna take you on the ride of a lifetime onto the shores of lives who do not believe love is real anymore. Communion isn't just about spiritual nourishment for our own sake. It's about setting ablaze a path right in front of us back to our seats, out into the streets to make yet another way of love to brighten lives near and far away.

We are more than given permission by God to go ahead and steal Jesus' material, because it's by far the best living example we will ever have to go off for eternity. Love, powerful love, is very much the only way to not only bring any hope to those who have lost all hope; but it was also the only way to save us and the whole world. The ultimate source of everlasting life has already been signed, sealed, and delivered by the most powerful author of love for all of God's children then, now and forevermore. And for that, we give thanks to God indeed! Amen!