



We Are the World



A Sermon By
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June 4, 2017
Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

An audio version of this sermon can be found on the Grace Church website at
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-06-04-AWW.mp3>.

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The Day of Pentecost

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To begin, I want to share some wisdom from those two great American philosophers, Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie:

*There comes a time, when we heed a certain call
When the world, must come together as one
There are people dying
And it's time to lend a hand, to life
The greatest gift of all*

Those words were written over thirty years ago, in response to humanitarian crisis in Africa, and yet, they are so important for us to remember today.

We all experience the world in different ways, depending on who we are and where we are from: it matters whether we are male or female, black or white, East Coast or West Coast, fairly well off or barely scraping by – it all affects our reality. The Chinese and Russians see things differently from Americans; Christians from Muslims; Asian Americans from Hispanic Americans. We all inhabit the same planet, we all breath the same air¹, we may even live in the same country, but there are many different worlds, many different languages, and most of the time, very little understanding.²

All of us tend to see life from our own perspective, based upon our background, and over time, we get pretty set in our ways. We think we have life all figured out. We know what's right. We know how to do things. Our point of view is the correct point of view. We can become so locked-in to our way of thinking that we are unwilling to listen to others, to hear what they have to say, but we are willing to do anything go to support our beliefs, and prove our beliefs, and defend our beliefs, even if that means going to extremes, even if that means hurting someone else. So, a student from Bowie State University, a recently commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, is stabbed while visiting the University of Maryland. Two men are killed in Portland, Oregon, when they come to the aid of some teenage girls. And, concertgoers in Manchester, England are rockin' the night away, when a bomb explodes, killing and injuring over a hundred people. It's just like Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie said: *there are people dying*; and, we're allowing it to happen.

The Bible speaks to this chasm that divides us. In the Book of Genesis, there's a story known as the Tower of Babel; and, according to the story, there was a time when the people of the world spoke the same language and shared the same words; but then, the people decided to build a tower, reaching all the way to heaven, as if to say, "We don't need God. We can do it all ourselves. We're fine all on our own." So, God scattered humanity across the face of the earth, and God confused our language. All of a sudden, we couldn't talk to one another. We couldn't understand one another. And, our differences became a curse, as everyone built walls to defend their own

¹ John F. Kennedy

² I gratefully acknowledge the work of the Rev. Samuel T. Lloyd, and one of his Pentecost sermons, who words and ideas are part of this sermon.

interests, and support their own way of life, and maintain their own sense of superiority. Our world came to suffer from what the philosopher William James called “torn apartness.”

But, that is not what God intended for this world God created.

Fifty days after Jesus’ death and resurrection, his disciples were all gathered together in Jerusalem. They were part of a huge, international crowd, there to celebrate a Jewish festival. There were people from Mesopotamia, and Asia, and Egypt, even some visitors from Rome. It was like Times Square on New Year’s Eve, with everyone having a good time, laughing and joking, enjoying the party, when, out of the blue, there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind. It filled the entire house where the disciples were sitting, rattling the windows, shaking the doors, and blowing right through the disciples. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among the disciples; a tongue rested on each of them; and, suddenly, they were speaking in other languages.

The people in Jerusalem were startled. They didn’t know what was happening and didn’t know what to make of it. It was confusing, and chaotic, and unbelievable, because everyone was hearing of God’s grace in their native tongue, and it just didn’t seem possible. “Are not these all speaking Galileans?” the people asked. “How is it that we hear each in our own language?”

That day of Pentecost was a miracle of communication and connection. People listened. They heard. They understood. There was a Spirit of unity, and kinship, and comprehension. It was the reversal of what happened at the Tower of Babel. In the face of all of the mistrust and misunderstanding, God’s Spirit was poured out to mend the torn apartness of our world: to open our eyes, and our minds, and our hearts to one another, to draw us together, overcoming the chasm that divides us and making us one family, one people, one human race, because that’s what God intended for this world God created, that’s what God wanted from the beginning.

We all need that Pentecost Spirit. We need the Spirit to blow through us today, like it blew through those disciples. The Bible tells us the fruit of the Spirit is patience, kindness, generosity and love, and with those feelings flowing through us, we are willing to open ourselves up to new ideas and new opinions, new points of view and new people. Filled with the Spirit we can be united and not divided. We can move beyond the torn apartness of our time, and we can trust each other, and understand each other, and we can speak the language.

But, we have to willing to overcome the divide. We have to put aside our stubbornness and our arrogance, our impatience and our selfishness. And, we have to stop with the “you versus me” attitude, as if all of life is a competition, and either I’m going to win, or you’re going to win, so I’m going to make damn sure that I win... because it doesn’t have to be that way.

We can all win. We can all help each other win. And, we can experience the oneness and wholeness of God together. As Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie wrote so beautifully:

*There's a choice we're making
[and] We're saving our own lives
It's true we'll make a better day
Just you and me*

Of course, I realize I’m preaching to the choir this morning. At Grace, we already know all of this. It’s what makes Grace such a unique church community. Looking around this morning, we see that we are male and female, black and white, gay and straight, with a whole lot more thrown

in, and we know that just doesn't happen in this world. We can see that we are all different, and we love that we're all different, because we all know it offers us a glimpse of God's kingdom. That's why diversity is our number one *Core Value*, and why we work to bring people of all races and cultures together to build their relationships with God and with others. We know what it is to experience the oneness and wholeness of God, and it's pretty special.

For this current program year, our theme has been *Sharing Grace*, and our hope has been to share God's love with each other and with those around us. As the year comes to a close next Sunday, what we have done is pretty amazing. Our Pennyworth Shop offered people quality goods and clothing at really low prices. The Day School educated our children in a caring, nurturing and diverse environment. Our Homeless Ministry strengthened our partnership with Samaritan Ministries, as we continued to care for the hungry and homeless. We began *Wade in the Water*, our ministry for racial justice. We have a group of parishioners who want to sponsor a refugee family and bring them to the United States. And, that's just part of it. There were other ministries I could have named, all of which were sharing God's grace.

But, that said, we have to keep going. We can't rest on our laurels.

Two thousand years ago, the Holy Spirit began to move, stirring in a small group of Christ followers, and then, through an ever-widening circle of people, regular people like you and me, people who wanted to share God's love with the world and heal the torn apartness. We have to keep that work going. We have to keep God's dream alive. We have to keep the fire burning.

*We are the world,
We are the children
We are the ones who make a brighter day
So, let's [keep] giving*

Amen.