

Michael Curry's impression on the bride and groom

The bishop preached first and foremost to the royal couple themselves—about their marriage and the work and witness they have said they want to offer.

by [Heidi Haverkamp](#)

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As the Episcopal Church's presiding bishop Michael Curry stepped up to the lectern of St. George's Chapel in Windsor Castle Saturday to deliver an "address" for the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, one friend watching the livestream, like me an Episcopal priest, posted this on Facebook: "The joy of The Most Rev. Michael Curry v. 600 Polite English Scowls. Who will emerge victorious?"

A BBC commentator clearly made that call, saying afterward, "That was a *sermon!*" It was not the dull "address" most wedding-goers—or even churchgoers—are used to. Despite the giggles and stares of so many elegant guests in the chapel that day, Curry electrified the world with his message of the power of love and the gospel of Jesus to change the world. Both [the footage](#) and [the transcript](#) have been posted on websites as varied as National Public Radio, the *Today* show, CNN, *Essence*, *Town and Country*, and a motherhood blog called Romper. Curry may have bested Billy Graham with the size of the audience that listened to him preach the good news of Jesus Christ—about 30 million people, not counting all those who have watched in the days since.

Some in my social media feeds criticized Curry for preaching too long (13 minutes), for "yelling," "taking advantage of the situation," "showboating," preaching "histrionics," and for being "too liberal" about God's love. Many more were filled with delight and joy at his description of love as "a way of life" and "a world where love is the way," not something "sentimental" but "power, real power."

Curry offers quite a contrast to most clergy who make the news—Robert Jeffress, for instance, who led prayers for the opening of the U.S. embassy in Jerusalem and has drawn criticism for his frequent public condemnations of Jews, Muslims, Catholics, and Mormons. Or, on the other hand, to pastors as portrayed by many movies and plays as corrupt, ineffective, or crippled with doubt and emotional problems. (Recently, the conservative church humor website the *Babylon Bee* posted [a satirical headline](#) that declared, “Episcopal Priest Forced To Resign After Revealing He Believes In God.”) A pastor and preacher who truly believes in love and in Jesus Christ is a shock to the world! Curry seems to have awakened an increasingly secular world to the possibility that God is not as dead as most have thought, that Jesus is alive and well and dwelling in the hearts of many intelligent and admirable people, that the church may not be entirely so judgmental or irrelevant as they had thought.

Curry brought not only the living word of God but the fullness of his personhood as a black American and a descendant of enslaved people into that chapel, a veritable fortress of historic, institutionalized, church-sanctified white supremacy. He is the first African American to hold the highest office of the Episcopal Church, a denomination that was the church home of many slaveholders, including half of the 12 American presidents who owned slaves. Curry’s identity as a black man brought realism and painful integrity to his message—invoking Martin Luther King Jr., the faith of “some old slaves in American’s Antebellum South,” Roman Catholic renegade Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and the beautiful and gripping cadence of traditional African American preaching. Diane Evans of the *Guardian* [put it this way](#): “It was a sermon that will go down in history as a moment when the enduring seat of colonialism was brought before the Lord, and questioned in its own house. In the mention of slavery was the inherent accusation of white silver-spoon complicity, and that this union should not go forth without acknowledging it.”

It was a momentous moment for many Christians, for the Episcopal and Anglican church, for the royal family, and yet still and most importantly, perhaps, for two people. [In an interview after the ceremony](#) alongside Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, Curry commented, “I’ve been ordained a long time... when you [preach at] a wedding, [I’ve learned, you] talk to the couple.” In the end, he wanted to be sure he was preaching to the two of them, about their marriage and the work and witness they have said they want to offer to Britain, its Commonwealth, and the whole world. It’s a witness made clear simply in the fact of their marriage—a white prince of a

colonial superpower and a biracial, divorced woman from its most famous breakaway province.

And so, Bishop Curry made an impression not only on people around the world, but on the bride and groom, as anyone can clearly witness in their listening faces on the video footage. I wish I could say that I'd ever preached a wedding sermon that drew any reaction from a groom like that Prince Harry gave, when after Bishop Curry sat down, in full view of the cameras, he mouthed the word, "Wow!"