Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

Acts 20:28-38; Jn 17:11b-19

Luke’s two-part testimony, his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, has been described as an hourglass turned on its side. The broad story of Jesus converges on his death and resurrection—the narrow waist of the glass—and then expands again into the world. Specifically, it comes into focus in Jerusalem and then proceeds to Rome, the center of the empire and the Mediterranean world.

This pattern shows us the importance and power of Pentecost, an explosion of insight and energy that propels the church outward from its Jewish birthplace to its mission among the Gentiles.

This same pattern is found in Jesus’ final revelations to his disciples in the fourth Gospel. The love that God the Father pours into Jesus the Son is then poured into the disciples by the Holy Spirit, so they can pour it into the world. People will know that Jesus was from God when they see their love expanding into the disciples and then into the world.

This dynamic expansion is the meaning of Pentecost, when the Spirit speaks every language through the disciples to unite every kind of human diversity in the unity of love. “I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me … that the world may know that you sent me.”

What Jesus accomplished in Jerusalem must be proclaimed in Rome, and so Paul, rejected by the Sanhedrin, warned of suffering in Ephesus, is fated to witness to Jesus as Lord in Rome, the one place where it will resonate to the whole world.

When Pope Francis described evangelization as moving out of the self-referential center of the church to the margins, he was affirming this plan and pattern. A tree grows from its core to its outer rings, where all nutrients flow from the roots as they sink deeper and the branches as they reach upward to the sun. A tree that only protects its core stops growing.

Divine love is dynamic, always deepening and expanding. Its power is not in the past but in the living present. Like every love relationship, the most important time is now, not in nostalgia or in past accomplishments, but it what happens today as fresh demands needs inspire our capacity to love in new and creative ways.

The central theme of the Gospel, God’s love, awaits our consent to expand. We are the growth ring of the mystery, and our fearless outreach into the world around us is the measure of the life of the Holy Spirit in us, here and now.

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