

The call of the Spirit

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 28 May 2023

Reflections by Allison Gentle and Kate Scholl

Pentecost A, Reconciliation Sunday

Acts 2: 1-21; John 20: 19-23; Contemporary Reading from 'One Pentecost in the Kimberley ...' Reflections on the Plenary Council' by Fr Brian F. McCoy SJ, Provincial.

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

ALLISON A short history of the Spirit

In the beginning, before God spoke the earth into being, the Spirit was hovering over the deep, dark waters. Later, God created humankind, and breathed into our nostrils the breath of life. By the Spirit, God made a covenant with Abraham, the first prophet.

Moses was given the Holy Spirit. Later, God took some of the power of the Spirit from Moses and gave it to 70 elders of the people of Israel so they could share the burden of leadership. Moses wished that all God's people could receive the Spirit.

God selected and anointed kings of Israel by the power of the Holy Spirit. If they turned from God's ways, the Spirit left them. King David committed murder and adultery, but he turned to God in repentance and asked that the Holy Spirit not be taken from him. He promised that if he was restored to God's grace, he would teach others who had transgressed God's ways and restore them also. He went on to write many psalms that have helped to restore others.

Isaiah prophesied about the coming of the Messiah, saying that the Spirit of God would rest on them, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and piety. Isaiah spoke of being anointed to proclaim good news to the poor, being sent by God to bind up the broken hearted, and to proclaim freedom for the captives. He exhorted people to seek justice and defend the oppressed.

Jeremiah prophesied about a new covenant when the law would be written on people's hearts. He spoke truth to power, warning the king that injustice and enriching himself at the expense of his people was displeasing to God, in contrast with the king's father, who defended the poor and needy, and all had gone well for him.

Ezekiel had a vision of a valley of dry bones where he prophesied to the four winds and breath was restored to the dead. This was given to him as a vision to encourage people who had lost hope, that life could be restored to them and they would know God. Ezekiel also exhorted people to turn away from injustice, from exploiting and oppressing the poor and needy.

Joel prophesied that the day would come when God would pour out the Spirit on all people, leaders and servants, men and women, young and old. Times of calamity give way to times of comfort, and if people turn to God with their whole hearts, God will restore what has been lost.

By the Spirit, God breathed life and hope and love into their Creation, into their prophets and into their community leaders. Even before the coming of Christ to the earthly plane, God was sending, imparting, guiding, consoling, restoring.

Why was Christ sent? Because God so loved the world. Christ came to fulfil the prophecies: to proclaim good news to the poor, bind up the broken hearted, and proclaim freedom for the captives. To establish a new covenant, to write the law on our hearts, to restore hope, and life, and the knowledge that God is God.

In the days before his death, Jesus promised the disciples that he would ask God to send the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who would be sent in the name of Christ. And in the days after his death and resurrection, Jesus appeared before the disciples and said “*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*” He breathed on them and said, “*Receive the Holy Spirit.*”

Fifty days after Good Friday, the disciples were again gathered when they were visited by a shared experience of the Holy Spirit. They found themselves speaking in other languages, which migrants and visitors to Jerusalem from many countries heard as their own, telling them about the marvels of God. Then Peter preached what may have been the first sermon of the new church, taking as his text the prophecy of Joel, that all would receive the Holy Spirit.

This day, named Pentecost because of the fifty days, became known as the birth of the church. The theologian Jurgen Moltmann said that there is church because there is mission, not the other way around. God sent the Spirit, the prophets foretold the coming of the Spirit to all humankind, God sent Jesus, and Jesus as high priest interceded for humankind to ask God to send the Holy Spirit to all of us. That prayer was answered on the day of Pentecost. Jesus told the disciples that as he was sent, so he sent them. And as the current generation of disciples, so we are sent, to bring hope, and love, and life to the world of our day.

We are all sent according to our calling. Some are called into human services, to bring care, hope and love to the poor and needy. Some are called into activism, to bring awareness of calamity, present and impending, to call for change. Some are called into social healing, to work for justice and reconciliation for those suffering under oppressive power structures. Some find a calling in their daily lives, opportunities to bring hope and love and restoration. The church exists because we are sent.

Cyril of Alexandria, an early theologian said, “*The one and undivided Spirit of God, who dwells in us all, leads us all into spiritual unity.*” Today concludes a week of prayer for Christian unity. We have seen some regrettable decisions made in the name of church unity, decisions to avoid alienating parts of churches that are not honouring the ancient call to seek justice and defend the oppressed. But we can be thankful for that essential unity that has provided a durable vehicle for our work in the world.

May our unity in the Holy Spirit, that has indwelled us all since the day of Pentecost, prevail.

Amen.

KATE **To listen – to trust – to journey together**

My brief reflection today is an attempt to share some of the common threads I hear in Pentecost story and our journey of Reconciliation.

Brian McCoy, in our contemporary and third reading, narrates an account of reconciliation inspired by their East Kimberly community's reflection on the first Pentecost. He says that Pentecost, *“enabled people to hear a new voice of hope in their own lives and in their own languages and cultures. This was the birth of the Christian community, a Church led by the Spirit reaching out into the world.”*

Brian speaks of the decision to acknowledge a massacre of some of the Aboriginal people's ancestors by stockmen on a nearby cattle station. He tells us of the careful preparation and listening to the elders leading up to their Pentecost weekend where they travelled to the massacre site.

Together they faced the truth, the pain and let the story be told. Brian called it *“A journey of companionship with trust in the power of the Spirit.”*

He concludes: *“I often return to the healing experience of that desert Pentecost weekend as a reminder and encouragement of what the Spirit can do within and between us if we are prepared to listen, trust and journey together.”*

Another journey celebrated its 6th anniversary on Friday -- The Uluru Statement from the Heart.

The delegates at the **First Nations National Constitutional Convention** gave our nation this profound and challenging statement. Like the early Christians on that Pentecost Sunday, they did not know what would happen but they had listened – trusted – and journeyed together in those 4 days and around the country in the two years prior.

Two millennia earlier in Acts, Peter speaks passionately of what is to come, quoting the prophet Joel:

“In the days to come — it is our God who speaks — I will pour out my Spirit on all humankind. Your daughters and sons will prophesy, your young people will see visions, and your elders will dream dreams. “

And the Uluru Statement from the Heart expresses the current truth and the hoped for future.

“Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future. These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem.

This is the torment of our powerlessness. We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.”

And in this Reconciliation week we are invited to *‘Be a Voice for generations’*.

So how do we respond?

We are not in an upper room in Jerusalem, or the East Kimberly or Central Australia. We are here in this church and in our homes watching online today.

Might we begin with acknowledging that we have a gift?

- A gift in the statement from the Heart.
- A gift in stories of reconciliation (and in the opportunity to advance reconciliation).
- And the gift of the Spirit through time which Allison just described so eloquently.

There's an invitation to listen,

to trust ourselves

and each other

and to set out together.

The story of Pentecost tells us that the words will be there.

I conclude my reflection with the closing lines of the statement from the Heart:

We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.