

# Flying kites of compassion and joy

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 16 June 2024

A Reflection by Rev Dr Josephine Inkpin

Pentecost 4B

Contemporary Reading: *Home* by Warsan Shine, a Somali poet; Mark 4: 26-34

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

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How do you feel about flying kites? In my view, there is something quite delightful about it, literally and metaphorically. If you love Mary Poppins, for example, you may remember that, in the sequel to P.L. Travers' original book, Mary comes back on the end of a kite string. In Walt Disney's film of 1964, kite flying is even more prominent. Together with the Sherman Brothers song '*Let's Go Fly a Kite*', it forms part of the conclusion as Mary's work with the Banks' family is completed.

The song is sung as the father, George, realises that his family is much more important than his financial job in the City of London. He mends his son's kite and takes his family kite flying. Eventually all the film's characters join in, and sing the song, even the forbidding crusty old men of the Stock Exchange. In that sense, kite flying is a delightful metaphor of transformation, both for individuals, families, and also for communities and the world as a whole. For the film's ending invites us all to join in, and to sing:

*Oh, oh, oh! Let's go fly a kite  
Up to the highest height!  
Let's go fly a kite and send it soaring  
Up through the atmosphere  
Up where the air is clear  
... Oh, oh, oh! Let's go fly a kite*

For, like the mustard seed in our Gospel reading this morning, humble and fragile though it may be, the kite is a wonderful metaphor for a key to life and transformation...

Too often, not least in our world today, we are told, and inclined to believe, that we need something more to find flourishing and transformation. Jesus however points out that it is much simpler, albeit in a way, much more demanding than that. It is much more simple, as all we need is faith as small as a mustard seed, the proverbial smallest and quite common of seeds. It is more demanding, as we typically find it hard to trust. For Jesus is telling us that true faith – life-giving faith – is not about a whole bundle of beliefs and practices, but about trust: trust in the love of God. From this, all kinds of things can go, individuals and communities can be transformed and flourish.

Faith as trust: from this all kinds of things can be nurtured and emerge. Among these are strength, resilience, and hope: powerful characteristics we celebrate in this Refugee Week. Not for nothing then is a kite string used this year as the Refugee Week motif.

Significantly the Refugee Week kite string is also arranged in the shape of human figures to reflect this year's theme, which is Finding Freedom: Family. For, like the string of a kite, Refugee Week 2024 affirms that families can give us the courage we need to fly as well as a safe path back to the ground. The loops of the Refugee Week graphic motif therefore allude to heads and shoulders, to figures that represent family. For this year's Refugee Week's theme invites us to explore the stories of refugees who, despite the challenges they encounter, discover a source of freedom within the embrace of their families.

Whether it is the unwavering support of parents, the protective love between siblings, or the communal strength found in extended and chosen families, neighbours, support systems upon arrival in Australia or the financial and emotional backbones that make the journey to safety possible, these connections become a beacon of hope in times of uncertainty. We are encouraged to celebrate the resilience of families torn apart by conflict or persecution and to be inspired to extend solidarity and compassion to those seeking refuge.

As one image of how family can enable freedom and flourishing featured on this year's Refugee Week poster are Aline, a former refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and her daughter, Ashley. Originally from Democratic Republic of the Congo, Aline came to Australia after spending years in a refugee camp in Sudan. She arrived here heavily pregnant with her baby girl, while her husband – whom she had met in the refugee camp – remained in Sudan due to COVID restrictions at the time. Starting here as a new mother while separated from her husband brought Aline numerous challenges. However, her bond with her daughter and the joy she found in motherhood gave Aline the resilience and determination to rebuild her life while waiting for her husband to join them.

Aline now lives in my own former city of Toowoomba and her image is but one of a number of families in Toowoomba photographed this year for Refugee Week, made possible through facilitation by CatholicCare's Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Service (TRAMS). For TRAMS, with others in Toowoomba, has done a fabulous job over the years of offering hospitality and assisting in flourishing re-settlement in Toowoomba. It is one of the powerful elements of transformation which have made those of us who love Toowoomba proud of it as an increasingly vibrant and happy multicultural city.

Seeing Aline's photo certainly brings me happy memories of many Sudanese and other families in my own ministry in Toowoomba. If Toowoomba can be a shining example of the generous hospitality Refugee Week invites us into, why also can others not follow? When TRAMS and similar initiatives began in Toowoomba, some would have thought that city and region to be very barren ground. Thankfully, so many Toowoomba folk have had faith like mustard seeds, trusting not fearing, and constructing kites of compassion and joy which now fly high, and changed community.

For if we seek to understand Jesus' teaching about the mustard seed, we might indeed do well to ponder and take up this year's Refugee Week symbol of the kite. Thereby we may play our part in Refugee Week's theme of Finding Freedom, and nurturing the kind of Family into which Jesus invites us. Let us therefore ponder the kite as a beautiful wider metaphor for the life of the Spirit among us and our world as a whole. After all, whilst most of us immediately think of kites as a created, crafted, entity, the name kite comes from that of a soaring, hovering, bird: a powerful image for the Holy Spirit.

Historically, kites are also deeply embedded in the cultures of Eastern Asia and Polynesia from whence they emerged, long before the birth of Christ. As such they offer us multicultural connections which help transcend our traditional Western limitations of time, place, and spirit. For kites, and kite-flying, invite us into finding freedom, in deeper renewing forms of family, tribe, community: closely akin to how the Holy Spirit, the great kite, is leading us today, through people from the margins, like Aline and her child, and other refugees.

The metaphor of the kite has of course been taken up in many ways over the centuries, not just via Mary Poppins. There is a lovely story recently, for example, called, simply, *Kites*, composed by the English writer Simon Moles and illustrated by the Chinese artist Oamul Lu.<sup>1</sup> The story tells that the sky is full of kites in a new place, Fivehills, to which a small child David has just moved. David however does not have a kite and he doesn't feel at home. Happily, deciding to build his own kite, David remembers his grandpa's mantra: "*let's see what we've already got. More often than not, we'll find the answers inside*".

So, requisitioning all sorts of items, David rushes out and up the hill to fly his newly made kite. Straight away he is accosted by well-wishing children eager to be of help to the new boy and novice kite-flyer. Within minutes they have each made helpful changes to his kite. Yet, even with all that help, it still does not fly. Burying his head in his pillow in sheer misery, David is then scratched by a feather – like his Grandpa's lucky feather - and he is inspired once more by the mantra: "*let's see what we've already got. More often than not, we'll find the answers inside*". Soon David has created a new kite and this time it flies.

Now, we are not told in the story whether David is a refugee in any way. Yet I think that each of us can recognise David's challenge in the story – especially if we are a refugee from hurtful places. For to learn how our kite, our spirit, can fly, can be a challenging journey. Yet, like Jesus' teaching and example, seen in many refugees today, we can be encouraged to trust that our kite, our spirit, can fly and that we can belong, through trusting the Spirit within, and between, us all. What a message of freedom that is!

Let me conclude by sharing the invitational ending of *Kites* to highlight this. For *Kites* encourages us to trust in the Spirit deep within, to grow in sharing together the gifts and insights of one another which can reshape our own kite-building, and to have the courage to let go into the movement of the Spirit itself. Along the way, learning to shape and fly a kite helps nurture virtues of persistence, co-operation, and humility. Indeed, when our efforts to fly a kite come to naught – when we fail to catch the wind, or when we crash and seemingly fail – we have not failed but simply need to return to listen and be lifted up again by the Spirit within ourselves and among one another.

After all, the greatest blessing of kite-flying is surely joy, and what a beautiful metaphor that therefore is of life in the Spirit, and of a Spirit-focused family - open and sharing with the Spirit in the world. For, as an unknown spiritual master in the Taoist tradition once put it:

*'a kite in the sky is a smile of the wind'*.

How might it then be to grow as communities as "*smiles of the Spirit*" to our world?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://medium.com/multi-entry/interview-with-oamul-b0af3d4b008a>

Wouldn't that be a lovely way of seeing church?

Perhaps it is therefore a little bit like how the little story *Kites* concludes:

*David blew on the feather once, a gentle breath of good-flight courage,  
then held his kite high and.... His kite was dancing.... But on its own.*

*Then another kite blinked on, next to his, sparkling,  
and then two more as if to answer it.*

*The sky still a vast abyss, dark and big,  
but starred by more and more kites now.*

*Each dancing in its own way, and together.*

So, in the words of Mary Poppins; 'Go fly a kite.'

In Jesus' name, Amen.