

The Pentecostal Spirit

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Pentecost, Year A, 28 May 2023

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Acts 2.1-21; Psalm 104.26-36; 1 Corinthians 12.1-13; John 20.19-23.

Ecology: the branch of biology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings. Ecology is about the physical.

Pneumatology: the branch of theology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings. Pneumatology is about the spiritual

And at Pentecost we see how the spiritual is embodied. How the ecological and the pneumatological become one. Today is all about the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings. Specifically, it names and celebrates what it is, or properly who it is, that creates those relations. What it is that binds us, if indeed 'binding' is a good word—we are very gently bound.

We are often told that the conditions for life to exist are so unlikely that it is a miracle that there is life at all—a miracle indeed. So, what we are also celebrating today is that the conditions for new life have been created for us; the conditions are so unlikely, that it is a miracle. Jesus by his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection has created the conditions for new life to emerge.

We heard this morning, in John's gospel, of Jesus breathing this spirit into the disciples gathered in the upper room. It is explicitly a spirit of forgiveness, the foundation of this new life and new community. For Luke, writing the Book of Acts, this community is now the entire world, and this Spirit is the means by which a common language now gently binds this community together.

Jesus once said that he was not about doing away with the Jewish law. He came, he said, to fulfill it but never explicitly said what this might mean. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians in the second letter he said: 'God has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.' This is perhaps the first time in recorded history that we read of the letter *and* the spirit of the law.

By Jewish tradition the faithful gathered in Jerusalem at this time: it is the feast of Shavuot which combines two major religious observances. First is the grain harvest of the early summer. Second is the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai seven weeks after the exodus from Egypt. The faithful gathered from every part of the known world for Shavuot are suddenly unexpectedly caught up in the giving of a new law. Shavout seven weeks from Passover, liberation from slavery in Egypt; Pentecost from the Greek fifty, it is fifty days since Easter, from the Christian Passover, our own liberation.

We are told that a first century multi-cultural festival is taking place. Perhaps we might imagine folk enjoying each other's food, culture, music, and dance, celebrating diversity. But this is a rather 21st Century view; this is not Canberra. There may well have been tension. The Romans were very wary of these gatherings in Jerusalem. There were, after all, three Jewish-Roman wars during these first centuries of this Common Era. The Book of Acts has many accounts of imprisonment and apostles being brought before courts. These were tense times and I doubt that the many different folk gathered in the city always saw eye-to-eye. We read of folk being perplexed, amazed, astonished, bewildered. Some sneered. They had gathered to celebrate the first fruits of the spring harvest, but instead they experienced the

first fruits of the spirit—the language of forgiveness and reconciliation. Some of them perhaps did not want to engage.

The Acts of the Apostles could well have been called The Acts of the Holy Spirit. It is about the conditions for this new life being created and, as such, it is a book that is still being written. Throughout history, we can see new chapters of this book being created. What we see happening in Jerusalem is recognition, peoples from all over the world recognising one another. Suddenly this disparate bunch have something in common, the means whereby they can communicate, the means whereby there is recognition. It remains today the human imperative, but we know how difficult that is and how some do not wish to engage.

I have been reading some reflections this past week, some of them theological, on the ‘Uluru Statement from the Heart.’ Peter Comensoli, the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, in his reflection cites the motto of John Henry Newman, *Cor ad Cor Loquitur*, heart speaks to heart. Rabbi Ralph Genende echoes a similar idea; he writes that Judaism is a religion of law, but that it is also a faith of the heart. Those folk at the first Pentecost gathered to celebrate the giving of the law but experienced the giving of the Spirit.

For us here in our place and time, Constitutional recognition for the indigenous people of this land has become a lightning rod for debate and contention. But recognition in law is just the beginning of this chapter, and I do not believe it will be sufficient unless we are caught up in the spirit of that law, a Pentecostal spirit of recognition and forgiveness, heart speaking to heart. The question for us as Christians—in a Church founded in the Anglosphere, is what are we to do? We could begin by engaging with both the ecological and the pneumatological—back to our definitions: understanding the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings. The passage from Psalm 104 that we read this morning speaks of the spirit giving life to creation. We could learn much from both the Jewish people gathered in Jerusalem for Shavuot *and* our indigenous folk concerning the land. Is this a place we could begin, the creation, the land and perhaps understanding the liberation that we could enjoy by sitting more lightly with an understanding of land as a source of profit, advantage, ownership and engaging instead with the sacred, the sacramental? This is after all where the Spirit resides in both our traditions. Is this where the beginning of recognition and reconciliation is to be found? Amen.