

Come and see the divine future.

St Philip's Anglican Church O'Connor

Pentecost Sunday — 29 May 2024

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Acts 2.1-21; Psalm 104.26-36; Romans 8.22-27; John 15.26-27, 16.4b-15

INTRODUCTION

I was driving the children to school in Kenya some 400kms from home. We had to pass from the spectacular mountain ranges where we lived to flat Nairobi plains. Then we came to the edge of the Rift Valley and began our descent. My mind was fixated on the destination on the other side of the Rift.

I gasped. The Valley opened before us; a vast landscape of breathtaking beauty. That same beauty and breadth would open up places for the family to explore and love: Freshwater lakes full of wildlife like hippos and crocodiles, volcanoes to climb and see the deep distant forests hidden in them and the occasional smoke and steam, vast salt pans and salt lakes lined with innumerable flamingos and guarded by wandering clans of Maasai herders.

A whole new vista and improbable possibilities.

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you... he will declare the things that are to come” (Jn. 16.13-14)

THE VISTA OPENS UP

Paul opens the vista moment for us. An unexpected moment.

The whole human and natural order is on tiptoes with expectation. At present it is not what it should be. It waits for something, something that will enable it to throw off its shackles in which it groans to become the enabler of life.

Paul always has the creation story in mind. The big story of our muddling with the created/social order that has brought it to its knees, reaches its climax in the cross and resurrection and ascension. The creation which is still pregnant with God's power and glory has been reduced to slavery and is not the way it should be.

The day of putting it all to rights has come. The days of human worship of power, greed, violence, the love of control of nature and humans to the detriment of many and the benefit of the very few, are on notice. The notice is the cross and resurrection. “The ruler of this world has been condemned.”

This is the content of our hope. It is not wishful thinking. It is the word of truth that the Spirit brings into the world. These are the things to come.

This is the setting for Pentecost. God putting his creation, human and not to rights. That is what righteousness means. Humans will find their proper place as God's co-workers exercising God's stewardship over creation.

This is the goal of human freedom. In Peter's view old people, young people, men and women of every class and language will share in God's glorious day and salvation will come to the whole cosmos.

Then, according to the Psalmist, the glory of the Lord will endure forever as the Spirit creates the renewed cosmos.

So that is the big picture, the vista. What are the possibilities it opens up? We can choose to close it down. We can choose to take risks and see what the vista reveals.

FROM THE PANORAMIC TO THE PARTICULAR

Now we move from the panoramic to the particular; from the grand and glorious to us, ordinary folks who are heirs to millions of other ordinary folks who have had to live the life of the Spirit in a broken world. With them we await the final consummation of the cross and resurrection in that glorious day as we fight for the life of the world.

It sounds a bit silly and unrealistic for ordinary folks like us to even think like that. Maybe like that first Pentecost we are just under the stupidity of alcohol and deceived by it.

Or maybe it is just what God would do and call old and young, men and women, slaves and free from all the languages of the earth to pick up whatever the Spirit is doing and follow that.

That is exactly what has happened. A few smart folk, billions of ordinary men and women have lived under the cross and the Spirit and changed things. Not perfectly, not without power struggles, not without conflict and every horrible human emotion. But also with love, joy, compassion, kindness and gentleness. And now it falls to us.

So, how do we go about the business of God's mission. To do that we need to be clear about what it is and means.

God's mission is nothing less than the sending of the Holy Spirit from the Father through the Son into this world, so that this world should not perish but live. Jesus said in Jn 14.19 "...because I live, (and) you will also live." The sending of the Spirit is the revelation of God's indestructible affirmation of life and his marvellous joy in life.

To put that another way, we are the builders of a culture of life who resist the barbarisms of a culture of death that assaults us on every side.

We are not a club spreading the Christian imperium, Christian civilisation or the values of the western world with a religious tinge. We are people struggling to find a way that leads from being a religious private club to the kingdom of God, from just being concerned for church bureaucratic priorities to the living world, from concerns about our private salvation and righteousness to the salvation of all.

We will need to cease putting in place programs that cater for self-interest and be people who are so in love with God's future of the new creation we can offer people the invitation to the divine future of the world.

Come and see the divine future. That is the future.

This where the particular becomes very particular. We cannot escape it. God's people are up for renewal. Acts give us the direction as does John in the Gospel and the Psalmist. The 'we' must begin with me. I must join the Spirit in the future of the crucified God. I must trust the crucified one to follow his Spirit into their future and ours.

And for that renewal to come to us we must start in prayer with the whole of creation suffering and groaning waiting for us to be renewed into our full humanity. Prayer is groaning with creation in its labour pains. We groan in empathy as day by day we wait for our own redemption, our bodies renewed in the new creation, to be made whole and ready for our adoption into God's future.

The new creation does not abolish bodiliness. It renews it for eternal livingness.

Only then, when we embrace that, can a new community come into being; a new community that furthers the connections of life. We know scripture seen in our Ps today teach that it is the breath of God fills the world, that holds all things together and brings renewal. If the Spirit is withdrawn, we shrivel and disintegration is all that is left.

It is that we want all people to come and see and share: The connections and cohesions of life that God's Spirit creates for us and among us. Life is community and community is the communication of life.

CONCLUSION

Come, Spirit of life,
Flood us with your light,
Interpenetrate us with your love.
Awaken our powers through your energies
And in your presence let us be wholly there.
Come Holy Spirit.

God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Triune God,
Unite with yourself your torn and divided world,
And let us be one with you,
one with your whole creation,
Which praises and glorifies you
And in you is happy.
Amen

Jürgen Moltmann