



Parramatta
Mission



uniting
church
in Australia,
Synod of NSW & ACT

Easter to Pentecost Reflections 2020

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Uniting Church in Australia

The Season of Easter commences on Easter Day and extends 50 days until Pentecost. On the fortieth day is Ascension. Every Sunday of the year is celebrated as Easter, as the resurrection of Jesus. This year the Pastoral Team will be providing a daily Bible reading, reflection and prayer to assist our members in their daily devotions. In the Acts of the Apostles, 2:41, Luke writes that the Christians “continued steadfastly to the apostle’s teaching and in community, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers.” Faith is a gift of God which is received in obedience. That obedience is expressed in nurturing the gift of faith, in living the Christian life with the whole of our life for the whole of our life. These reflections are our humble contribution to encouraging and nurturing our church in the faith.

Blessings, The Pastoral Team

Reflections will be written by:

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Rev Dr Manas Ghosh,

Rev Christine Bayless Kelly,

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Numbers 11:24-30 - Monday 25th May 2020

²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. ²⁵ Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again. ²⁶ Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷ And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." ²⁸ And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My lord Moses, stop them!" ²⁹ But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!" ³⁰ And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp. (NRSV)

Reflections

It is now evident to me that I seldom read the book of Numbers. Is it because the name, so suggestive of spreadsheets, statistics and data, is not "my thing"? It is true that the book seems to take its name from a couple of censuses. And, I must confess, there is more action in this book as the people move away from their expression at the hands of the people of Israel and make ready to enter the promised land of Canaan. Some may feel a discomfort there as this entry is, of course, an act of invasion somehow with the support with the Lord God. It is not a theme that travels so well these days. These musings lead into a confession: the names Eldad and Medad have never detained me in the past. It seems as if they belong to a school of prophets. They have acquired the right registration but they have remained inside the camp while the others have gone outside to where the Tabernacle is. In other words, though they are performing the right role, they are doing so in the wrong place. Joshua is disturbed by their practice which Moses nevertheless allows.

In the UCA we use the language of being prophetic a lot: it expresses our concern for 'responsibility' to the well-being of the nation. It is often tied to advocacy, social justice and a willingness to stand with the least. The dilemma surrounding Medad and Eldad is that the Tabernacle is where the other elders are receiving the gift of prophesy. It is a reminder for us how this self-belief about being prophetic must also include a recognition of the reign of God.

Prayer: *we pray that our churches may be prophetic in their love of God and neighbour*

Clive Pearson

Psalm 104:24-34. 35b Tuesday 26th May 2020

- 24** O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
- 25** Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
- 26** There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.
- 27** These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
- 28** when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
- 29** When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
- 30** When you send forth your spirit, [a] they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.
- 31** May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works -
- 32** who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.
- 33** I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
- 34** May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the Lord.
- 35b** Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!

Reflection

We are surrounded by so much beauty in the natural world. God's glory is present in all of creation.

He is the creator and sustainer of all things. Of all people. This psalm is an extended meditation on the natural world, and the foundational role that God plays in his creation.

He is present with us, sustaining all life. How valuable it is to stop in the midst of our busy lives, and 'smell the roses'. A necessary change of perspective.

As this psalm delights in the many wondrous and praiseworthy aspects of life, what in your life, in this day, at this time, can you praise God for? Take some time out today, to seek out and then savour, something or someone who God has provided, just for you - and, for no other reason, than it is God's pleasure.

And, as the psalm also shows, what is your response to God for this beautiful and generous provision?

Prayer: Praise, and honour and glory are yours, O Lord.

Thank you for your love shown in every detail, from the immensity of the stars and the earth under my feet, right down to each, individual blade of grass and the leaf of every tree. The song of every bird. The breath of each person.

Your gifts are without end.

Amen

Sarah Bishop

1 Corinthians 12:3-13 - Wednesday 27th May 2020

³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. ¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (NRSV Translation)

Reflection

Apostle Paul wrote this letter around 55 CE to the Christians in the city of Corinth which was a wealthy trading centre. The Corinthian Christians' struggles, which Paul notes earlier in this letter and addresses in this passage, exist in every age and every church – jealousy, striving, arrogance, and a propensity to measure one's worth through comparisons with other people. These are more so in today's culture because of its embrace of competition, individualism, and social Darwinist ethos (the wealthy and powerful enjoy the privileges they do because they are more fit in terms of the traits favoured by natural selection), resulting in dysfunction and disunity in the Body of Christ – the Church.

To heal the divisions Paul reminds the Corinthians that unity must spring from their common identity as people in Christ. Being united to Christ, Christians are united to one another.

Having observed that some Corinthians considered their gifts of greater value and of more spiritual maturity than others, thus creating categories of superior and inferior Christians, Paul challenges their mindset by asserting that creating qualitative categories among believers contravene the gospel, which proclaims that it is the "one and the same" Holy Spirit gives gifts that equip Christians for various yet complementary ministries for the specific purpose of creating a unified, interdependent body of believers. So, the consistent refrain through verses 4-11 is that the one Spirit dispenses a diversity of gifts. Paul doesn't give an exhaustive inventory of the gifts that God dispenses for there are many other gifts. But his point is clear – each and every gift however small or big, are from the same Spirit and of equal value in the sight of God when used lovingly, sincerely and faithfully for the work of God's kingdom. The Spirit's work is cohesive, uniting believers into "one body" comprising members that function interdependently.

So, Paul advises that no single person or group should claim exclusive insight into the Spirit's presence or the complete nature of the Spirit's activity. Each and every member's contribution is vital because "God is at work" in them (12:6). God's Spirit is not bound to our own strategies, systems, or expectations, for the Spirit freely chooses to be present among Christians (12:11).

As a community of diverse people if we are to reflect the fullness of God's Spirit, in and through our worship, witness and service, we must manifest unity in diversity, using our diverse gifts and insights that proclaim Jesus and sustain his body.

Manas Ghosh

John 20 : 19-23 –Thursday 28th May 2020

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (NRSV)

Reflection

The way in which John tells the story of Jesus is not the same as the other three gospels. Only John refers to this story of Jesus breathing upon the disciples in a locked up house whereupon they received the Holy Spirit. What is rather striking is the reference to the forgiveness of sins. The language of forgiveness does not seem to be as common in our societies as once it was. There is a lot more talk of our rights. We seldom here of folk in the public domain speak about forgiveness – and it stands out when it does occur. Think of the mother and father of the children killed by the car mounting the footpath earlier this year in Oatlands. The mother spoke of forgiveness and all at once those words were splashed across the media. I have often wondered what it was like for that woman to say those words and how she must feel now. There is a cost to forgiveness. It asks a great deal of us. What must it be like for the driver of that car to hear these words that she so freely gave: “if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them”. He now has his memories of what happened and they will accompany him for the rest of his life. I wonder if he knows where those words to forgive came from. I wonder if he knows that his sis have been forgiven through the actions of this extraordinary woman.

Prayer: *Let us pray for the peace of those who have forgiven the sins of others: let us pray for those who have sinned and do not know that they have been forgiven.*

Clive Pearson

John 7:37-39 Friday 29th May 2020

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Rivers of Living Water

³⁷ On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. As^[a] the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart^[b] shall flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit,^[c] because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Reflections

These few short verses hold a lot of symbolism and significance. Thursday of this last week was Ascension Day. Since the events of Easter until the Ascension, Jesus had appeared to his disciples several times, reassuring them. Then he was gone, and, from that time on they would no longer see him but would know the empowerment of his promised spirit. Next Sunday we celebrate Pentecost and the dramatic way in which the Holy Spirit came to the assembled believers. The presence of the Spirit changes things. In this passage, Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Tabernacles which celebrates God's provision for the Israelites in the desert, led by Moses. Part of the feast involved the high priest taking a scoop of water from the Pool of Siloam and pouring it into a silver bowl in the Temple, praying for rain, which symbolized the presence of God's Spirit for them. Now Jesus identifies himself with this water and the Spirit. It reflects what he said to Nicodemus about being baptized with water and the Spirit, and how he told the Samaritan woman at the well that he was the living water. Jesus knows the power of the Holy Spirit. He embodied it while he was alive. It would not be until after his resurrection and ascension that the Spirit would be there for all those who believed and followed him. It is through the gift of this same Spirit that we may call ourselves followers of Christ.

Prayer: *Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us, so that we may grow in faith and understanding and be empowered to follow you, even in desert places, for your living water never dries up. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Mary Pearson

Acts 2:1-13 - Saturday 30th May 2020

1 When the day of Pentecost had come they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there was a sound from out of heaven like a violent wind or breath and it filled all the house where they were sitting, 3 and there appeared to them tongues as of fire being distributed and sitting, one on each of them, 4 and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit emboldened them. 5 Now there were living in Jerusalem Jews, devout people from every nation under heaven; 6 when this sound happened the multitude came together and were confounded because each one heard them speaking in their own language. 7 And they were amazed and wondered saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear each in our own dialect in which we were born, 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the ones inhabiting Mesopotamia, both Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 both Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and converts, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking in our tongues the great deeds of God." 12 And all were amazed and greatly perplexed, saying to one another, "What do we make of this?" 13 But others, mocking, said, "They are drunk with new wine." (Translation by Keith Hamilton)

Reflection

Pentecost is another feast day in the church year. It is a celebration of the Holy Spirit of God at work in the gathered church and in the members of the church scattered throughout the world. There is a relationship with baptism. Baptism marks the beginning of our journey in the faith and the entrance to the church. In Baptism we are joined to Jesus in his baptism, death, and have the promise of the resurrection. Baptism also marks the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. Baptism marks the giving of spiritual gifts for the building up of the church, and ministry and mission in the world. Each one of us in the church has been given spiritual gifts, charisma, from God. With each gift comes a corresponding service. Here we read of Peter using his gift to preach. As we use our spiritual gifts both in the gathered church and as the scattered church, our prayer is that people might marvel at the great deeds of God.

Prayer: A Litany to the Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit, you are the Lord, the giver of life;
with the Father and the Son we worship and glorify you:
Come to us now, Spirit of God.

Holy Spirit, you were there at creation before time began;
your presence fills the whole universe:
Come to us now, Spirit of life.

Holy Spirit, you have spoken through the prophets of old;
by their witness the Word of God has never been silent:
Come to us now, Spirit of wisdom.

Holy Spirit, you surround the waiting church with the wind of Pentecost;
you gave life and breath to announce Christ's gospel:
Come to us now, Spirit of power.

Holy Spirit, you came upon the first Christians as a holy fire;
you set their hearts ablaze with devotion to their risen Lord:
Come to us now, Spirit of love.

Holy Spirit, you pour out your rich and varied gifts;
you call us to bring forth your fruits in our lives:
Come to us now, Spirit of grace.

Holy Spirit, you are the Spirit of truth, the Counsellor;
you lead us to the truth that sets us free:
Come to us now, Spirit of God, and renew Christ's holy church.
Amen.

*From *Uniting in Worship, People's Book**

Keith Hamilton

Acts 2: 14-21—Sunday 31st May 2020

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. ¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. ²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ (NRSV)

Reflections

Each year we hear these words and are reminded of an amazing event in the life of the early church. And it was beyond our understanding and appreciation. Yet, just as the Holy Spirit had gathered 120 men and women together in the one space, the presence of God’s Spirit overflowed the room where they had gathered and the crowd of men and women outside wondered what was going on.

Then Peter, the fisherman, the one who had denied Christ, somehow experienced a boldness. He knew scriptures and understood more than most people realised and inspired by what was happening he dared to speak out to the crowd of men and women from many different places to explain what was happening.

The audience was mixed, gender, age, cultural language background, those who sold and those who bought, yet they all could see something extraordinary was happening. In harking back to the prophet Joel, Peter was able to challenge the hearers to listen and understand the way the Holy Spirit transcends difference and enables all people to be a part of what God is doing. Words of great inspiration for everyone, not just the men of Judea!

Christine Bayliss Kelly