

**St. Margaret's Uniting Church  
Mooroolbark**

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2018  
Day of Pentecost**

**Welcome**

**All are invited to share morning tea following the service**

**WE GATHER TO WORSHIP GOD:**

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE WURUNDJERI PEOPLE

GREETING & INTRODUCTION

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all ... **and also with you.**

WE SING 'Holy Spirit, wind of heaven' (*Steve Garnaas-Holmes*)

CALL TO WORSHIP & OPENING PRAYER

**WE LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD:**

SHARING THE EARLY WORD

WE SING 'Come O Holy Spirit Come' (*TIS 711*)

NEW TESTAMENT READING Acts 2:1-21 *The Coming of the Holy Spirit*

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered,

because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

But 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. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

"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.  
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.

And I will show portents in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

The sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

GOSPEL READING John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15 *The Work of the Spirit*

‘When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them.

‘I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, “Where are you going?” But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

‘I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

For the word of the Lord ... **thanks be to God.**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION & WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

Friends, in the name of Christ, you are restored again,  
**Thanks be to God! Amen.**

REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES

Rev. Thom Schuman begins a reflection this week with these words:

*I dread Pentecost. There, I've said it.*

*Oh, at one time, it was one of my favorite Sundays. I loved inviting people to wear red (even the first time I did that, taking off my traditional black preaching robe to reveal a bright red one). I liked using the balloons, and loved the processions, and coming up with new ways to represent this day. But not anymore.*

*See, now I find Pentecost to be one massive guilt trip.*

*After all, I've never preached a sermon that made 3 people, much less 3000 want to be baptized. I've never gotten folks so excited about the good news that they suddenly wanted to share it. I've never (fortunately, I think) been in a church where suddenly a multitude of languages is spoken. So I find Pentecost makes me feel pretty guilty.*

His words struck me because I've never really allowed myself to think like this. But if we look around, and if we reflect on church communities that have slowly aged and dwindled over the decades of our lives, perhaps there is more truth here than we care to admit.

As a minister of the church I console myself with the reminder that my call and our call is to be faithful, not successful. And yet it is hard not to notice the so-called success of neighbours with massive churches and energetic preachers, flashy lights and noisy music. And likewise it is tempting to look across the road and note that somehow we are more successful than those who have closed doors.

Rev. Schuman suggests that one of our modern-day problems is that the day of Pentecost has somehow turned into a model of success. This early church account seems to echo the work of successful mega churches who seem to reach out and bring in many seekers, offer places that seem full of power and excitement, places that can pull off pyrotechnics even greater than tongues of fire descending upon believers. Not to mention the speaking in tongues and all associated with that.

Have I failed if I've not converted thousands, or cannot speak murmurs or sway in apparent spirit filled frenzy? Have we failed if we often feel burnt out rather than like there are flames dancing on our heads?

I want to say emphatically NO.

That is not the spirit of Pentecost. Rather, Pentecost is a recognition, a moment in time, where the church was birthed or discovered its call. And that call is to be the body of Christ for the sake of the world.

We heard earlier in our worship that God comes to us as the kiss of life. This phrase from Rev. Joanna Love (Church of Scotland) comes with her reflection that God is big on restoration and recovery. It is what we have seen in Jesus. Jesus shows us how to welcome, to love, heal, invite and include others into a place of belonging. Pentecost is God's empowerment upon people like you and me who follow Jesus to share God's love in the same way.

Now that doesn't take frenzied activity, murmuring in divine languages, flashy pyrotechnics or emotive preaching. It takes faithfulness, like Jesus was faithful to the call of the Father upon him.

And if Rev. Love is right that God is big on restoration and recovery, then that is exactly what we are called into.

And if you are like me then this is in ways far from flash and grandeur or emotive preaching and mass gatherings. Rather I find the place for that in the quiet moments, in ones and twos, in ways that go deep, in ways where we know together that God is big on restoration and recovery.

Lights and noise may well inspire some, but they can also be places of distraction. And rather than distraction, let us continue to speak grace to a despairing world. Let us continue to model peace to those who are full of fear and anger. Let us stand up to oppression and walk with those burdened with injustice.

Let us stand with those robbed of a just asylum from persecution.

Let us stand against those who war and threaten with flexed muscles.

Let us stand against those who look after themselves at the expense of the most vulnerable.

Let us stand with first peoples of this country as they continue to be deprived of basic human rights.

Let us stand with those harmed by others; those made to feel worthless

by others; those rendered lonely and alone through life's circumstances. Let us stand with those who feel their bones are dry and life has left them and love as Christ has first loved us.

You know some of these stories. In our local schools there are children who struggle too early in life, but they are mentored by folk here who go about their care in simple and ordinary ways. Or there are volunteers to hospitals, to shelters, to courts, to prisons. Or there are those who speak up to raise the voices of Aboriginal folk; or speak up against racism; or speak for those silenced on Manus; or speak for those marginalised due to gender identity.

None of this is big or flashy. None of it is successful by any measure of human endeavour. Just about none of it gets noted in our news cycle, and often we don't notice it ourselves. And yet this is what we are called to do, to be, to live.

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me, on us, on this community. For this place, this community needs a spirit of gentleness amidst a culture of cruelty. And I believe the Spirit moves far more creatively in the tongues of those broken, lonely or forgotten, than those who have success and power to spare.

So today we embrace the Spirit of the Living God. Fall afresh with a gentle nudge at our backs to send us to serve all alienated by a success driven world. And in those quiet spaces, the body of Christ will be found.

For that is what Jesus did. And it is our commission to do as he has done.

In Acts we hear that all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. There are many love languages, and I wonder what your language is? Is it the language of sharing life as mentor to a school child? Is it the language of writing to folk stuck on Manus Island? Is it the language of care towards those unemployed in your neighbourhood? Is it language that shares with those who find themselves homeless?

What is your love language, your Spirit-given ability as gift to be shared?

## **WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD:**

WE SING 'She sits like a bird' (*TIS 418*)

OFFERING

PRAYER

**Loving God, whose Life-giving Holy Spirit hovered over the waters of chaos at the dawn of creation – who breathed life into all beings, and who continues to work in all creation to sustain that life - Be with us now at this critical moment of our history.**

**Open our ears to the cries of the earth, to the suffering the effects of human exploitation, and to unbridled consumption.**

**As we dedicate this offering, may the winds of your Spirit blow through this place, compelling us to increase our compassion, for all your people and for all Creation. We offer this gift in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.**

SHARING FROM THE CHILDREN

WE SING 'Set us free for freedom' (*Shirley Murray*)

## **SENDING FORTH OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD:**

BLESSING and SENDING OUT

SENDING OUT SONG 'There's a spirit in the air' (*TIS 414*)