

What is your language?

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 31 May, 2020

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Gareth Thomas-Burchell

Pentecost A

Numbers 11:24-30; John 20:19-22; Acts 2:1-21

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

In this Contemporary Reflection, I invite you to ponder: what is your language? *What is your language?*

As we celebrate Pentecost 2020, we note that it is the occasion when we live in the unique time of the convergence of three major events. Pentecost 2020 has coincided with COVID-19 and National Reconciliation Week. This unique time gives opportunity for us to bring these three events into a very unique context.

Yes, we know that the Day of Pentecost is the birth of the church. Everybody knows that; and the outpouring of God's Spirit. But it is much more than that. It was the day that the followers of Jesus discovered that what Jesus promised was fulfilled. It was the day to take responsibility and to respond boldly. It was indeed the revealing of God through all people.

National Reconciliation Week is that time of the year between the dates of 27th May to 3rd June that frames Referendum Day and the High Court decision of Mabo. During the week, we also mourn the treatment of the First People since second people settlement on Sorry Day. It is a week of remembering the need for restoring relationship with the First People of Australia. The theme this year is suitably "*In this together.*" Indeed, we are.

And the event of COVID-19 has been unprecedented, and forced humanity into reprioritising and re-thinking its treatment of the world, and how it relates to the whole of creation. Time will tell what will eventuate.

The funnelling of these three occasions has intensified the resolve for change. With these three events meeting in the same time, the church would do well to ask about the language it speaks. Pentecost was - and is - a time of speaking and listening to many languages. What language do you speak and what language do you relate and understand?

Pentecost brought about a meeting of the people of many languages, many cultures and origins, and many beliefs. What had been a world of separation was the heralding into a world of wholistic relationship, and the language of God was being heard and understood by the diverse many of the time. And for the first time! The promised Spirit of God had arrived and was being experienced by the masses.

Pentecost was the day when the followers of Jesus realised their own potential, something that Jesus had been harping on about to them during his ministry, when he walked and talked and touched and healed and ate with and lived among for those few years that he was with them.

Pentecost was the day to not just be a follower of Jesus, but to be a co-worker and a sharer of ministry and mission with Jesus. And while we enter into the mind games of imagining the images that we have just heard ... like the rush of a violent wind, divided tongues like fire resting on all the people gathered ... an image that can only excite the listener of the story ... we are left to wonder what this might mean for us today.

Though the images get can get us going up to a point, it is the change of mind and attitude of the disciples and followers of Jesus that they had when they were in that room that day. The realisation from being a frightened and hidden follower of Jesus, to being an emboldened proclaimer of Jesus was the huge difference. That is the image that captures us all.

What did the Day of Pentecost look like? It looked like a total transformation, a restoration, an upheaval from fear, to a release into wild expression where there were no bounds.

The day of Pentecost is the invitation to speak a different language, not so much about speaking French or Indonesian or Russian or Swahili or one of the many Aboriginal languages, but speaking the different language of attitude and behaviour and understanding of belief.

Pentecost is the bringing together of a diverse world into community. Pentecost is the invitation to break free from an 'eyes down' withdrawn self, to a raised awareness and fully seeing realisation, that there is a people out there ready to share and participate. That is what Pentecost looks like! It is the realisation that God's Kin-dom is here and now, of which we are all participants.

Pentecost calls us to speak a different language, from the language of individuality to the language of community; from the language of selfishness and ego-centricity, to the language of inclusion and consideration for others and for the whole of creation.

Community events drag us out of being individual into being in community.

Are you now hearing how Reconciliation Week, COVID-19 and Pentecost are holding common ground? As the theme of Reconciliation Week says, “*In this together.*” How prophetic is that!

And being part of the church is not just switching on your computers and activating zoom. We are the called people of God, called into being, called into action, called into life! Called by Jesus to be taking an active part in Christ’s ongoing mission.

The Day of Pentecost dragged the disciples out of their present reality of self-preservation, to the reality that the Holy Spirit had ignited them to reaching out to beyond themselves.

The Day of Pentecost yanked the disciples out of their frightened existence in the privacy of their room, into the vastness of the big wide world.

What happened in that room filled the frightened disciples - must have caused the people to come running to them to find out what on earth was going on. They could hear what was going on because their language was being spoken. The exclusive language of inside became the inclusive language of outside. Pentecost lured the followers of Jesus outside of their room, outside their traditions, outside of themselves, outside of their own lives and into the lives of others.

So - what if Pentecost is about luring us outside? What if Pentecost lures us outside of our comfort zones, outside of our traditions, outside of our own agendas, outside of our own language?

How is the Holy Spirit at work in your life? Our life?

How can the Holy Spirit change us? How can the Holy Spirit change our language?

I invite you to join me in a meditation.

*Imagine people from all around the world:
from Australia to Britain,
to the Americas and Europe.
From Africa and Asia and all places in between;
from places of hope, and places of anger;
places of plenty and places of hunger;
people who are overwhelmed by emptiness
and people who are overwhelmed by abundance;
people from yesterday and today, and tomorrow –
imagine all these people gathered in one place.*

*Unsure, uncertain,
captured by fear,
we wait – wondering what it is
that we are waiting for.*

*And in the midst of all time and space
God's Spirit bursts in, once again,
as she always does,
and we are reminded that God,
our Creator God,
our loving and forgiving God,
our God that never lets us go
has come to us once again.
The risen Christ, who we sometimes fear has left us,
is right here in our very midst,
and we are overcome with joy.*

*And while others may laugh at us
and make fun,
and tell us we are too full of fanciful ideas
and not dealing with the "real" world,
we know that the real world
is God's place,
and that reality is seeking to align ourselves
with God's will.*

*And hear these words from the prophet Joel:
God's Spirit is poured out,
lavishly overflowing,
on all people – all ages and colours,
regardless of gender or status,
no matter who we are or where we have been -
God's Spirit is poured out upon us
and we know, as sure as the sun rises and sets,
that God's love is for all people.*

Fellow followers of Jesus Christ, we have been commanded to move: move in attitude and behaviour, move in location, move in language. So what is your language? What is the language to which you have been called? Know that it is your language that people will notice, see and hear and understand.

Pentecost is the time and place that Jesus has transformed and equipped and called you. Pentecost is the time and place that Jesus has given you a language that is uniquely yours. Go and use it. That is what Jesus promised to those 120 followers in Jerusalem 2000 years ago. That time is also now, the time of Pentecost!