

# What is the spirit saying to the people?

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 14 March, 2021

A Contemporary Reflection by Jolyon Bromley

Lent 4B

Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21

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

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This is unusual! We don't normally have a reflection before the readings. But this isn't really a reflection, more of an introduction to a process to listen for what the spirit is saying to the people? What the spirit is saying to you personally?

It's an unusual morning, sandwiched between the afterglow of the remarkable success of the Sounding the Alarm for Climate Change event here on Thursday and the excited anticipation of the induction of our new minister the afternoon. As is so typical of life we come with mixed emotions today surrounding Des Perry, his mother Isobel and sister Robyn with our loving support as they grieve the death of Des's brother John.

The intention for this morning is to be simple, gentle and meditative; a process of inner listening and personally responding to the readings.

We won't be turning to our neighbour to share. I'm very happy to discuss things on Thursday lunchtimes at Reflect and Connect or after the service at Exploring Faith but in the morning service I like to sit passively, drinking in whatever is said, letting it all wash over me and taking what I can from the liturgy and reflection.

I'm inviting you to listen actively to each of the four readings and just write down a word or phrase that stands out for you. There will be a space with music following each reading for you to do the writing. At the end we'll have a time of overviewing and quietly reflecting on what you've written.

At every stage of life, no matter our age, we're doing inner work either consciously or beneath the surface in the subconscious. We're needing to understand the changing world around us, the people and relationships in our lives and most importantly, trying to understand ourselves and why we do things. We're aware of questions arising, ideas changing, world views evolving, relationships warming or cooling.

This subconscious is a complex realm where the shadow, our negative double, our dark side is at work but also our higher self, the spirit, or we could say the Christ. One of our tasks in this life is to bring light into our own darkness, to transform, redeem the shadow. This is a kind of metaphor for understanding what motivates us in a particular moment. Why we react or behave in certain ways.

Transforming the Shadow is one of my favourite topics – it's explored in so much literature, in fairy tales and cinema. We identify the finger-prints of the Shadow in cynicism and sarcasm, disrespecting people, mocking, all kinds of nastiness, graduating to abuse and violence and worse. The effects of the shadow are all around us acted out on our TV screens every night. We see it manifesting in mob violence like the storming of the Capitol in Washington or the mass offense over a cartoon in a paper.

The Shadow loves a scene, to create a drama but it loses its power when it's named and when we bring a cool centring to the situation, see the bigger picture, put things in perspective.

Let me give some examples of things I'm working on with my Shadow! Maybe they'll resonate with you.

- I've decided to not let myself get irritated, just let things go
- Not to take offense at what someone says
- Not to feel I have to set people straight about things or correct them
- Not take myself too seriously!
- Is there something you are aware of working with at the moment?

Sometimes we need other people to call us out when the Shadow has taken over. We also need times of self-reflection when we objectively observe our behaviours and interactions.

In the esoteric spiritual traditions that have always run parallel to the church, the starting point was always – "O Human Being, know thyself." The Christian Mystery Schools at Santiago de Compostela and Chartres were centres of these spiritual traditions until they were pulled into line by Rome. And they went underground as secret lodges like the Rosicrucians. But there are vestiges that remain and have been revived.

The labyrinth built into the floor of Chartres cathedral was rediscovered and walking the labyrinth has become a worldwide movement. It's an active, walking meditation offered by Elizabeth Lee on the first Friday and the fourth Friday of every month in Centennial Park.

Walking the labyrinth we each find our own meaning in the experience – symbolically we journey into our own centre. I'm alone walking the path, not knowing what twists and turns lie ahead but aware of others, maybe ahead or behind, perhaps on an inner level experiencing something quite different from myself but on the same path so there is a sense of kinship.

In that inner space the spirit can speak to us in intuitions or at other times in conversations, sharing reflections, in works of literature, in hearing the scriptures. And in so many ways! I could go on –

*"But at my back I always hear  
Time's winged chariot hurrying near."*

So how about today? We continue on the Lenten journey - with the ancient Israelites dealing with the privations of the wilderness.

We're with the later Hebrews, constantly threatened by invasion and internal disputes.

We're with Jesus in dialogue with the Jewish religious leader Nicodemus

We're with the early church, the gentiles in Ephesus struggling to understand who Jesus was and what it means for them.

So I invite you to hear the readings and actively listen for what the spirit is saying to you. And write down that word that grabs your attention in each reading.

After the readings

I invite you now to take a few moments to reflect on the words you have chosen and think about how they add up. Perhaps take them into your own inner space.

Silence

My words were - Lifted up, steadfast love, grace, eternal love.

I'd love you to share your words with me later.