

# So Many Voices

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 3 May, 2020

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Karyn Burchell-Thomas

Easter 4A

Acts 2:42-47; John 10:1-10

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

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## A Seasonal Thought

I'm feeling like it's Wednesday everyday right now. There's a change in the air. The weather is changing and I feel like we've kind of hit "hump day". You know, Wednesday you've worked for two and a half days, it's the third day of the week but there's still half of the week to go before the weekend. I'm feeling a little bit like that every day right now - in isolation - self-isolation like all of us, caring for one another by isolating.

There's been some announcements this week that there'll be a little break in the next few days. Indeed it's already begun. That a few of us can, in twos, go and visit others - carefully, safe distancing and still with all the concerns that we've had all along since we are self isolating.

I'm still reminded of Wednesday and it being Wednesday. On Wednesday, you think the work is nearly done. I'm halfway, I'm nearly there. And then if one pulls back and slows down, by the end of the week there's still a whole lot more to do and more pressure is on. I'm thinking we need to be careful; perhaps even more than we have been, while isolated in the way we have.

This week, as we start to take a few new steps and meet some people we haven't caught up with for maybe a couple of months now.

May we give thanks for all we have and think of all of those for whom this struggle is so great. God help us find a way together as a world.

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## Reflection

The two readings today tell us two different stories - but they're both quite connected in many ways.

The first was from Acts chapter 2 and it talked about building the vision of the new church community, the new faith community that had grown out of the life of the Resurrection, now alive in the people. They were sharing together, praying together, meeting together regularly. Hospitality was generous, fellowship was strong, it was an inclusive community and it was just a wonderful time.

Of course that wonderful time was something of a bubble in a bigger time of trauma across the globe as they knew it at the time - with countries fighting, the temple had fallen and so when this story was told this became something of a beacon to look forward to, to hold on to as an aspiration, because they were struggling.

The second reading was from the Gospel - John chapter 10, the first ten verses, ending in: *I came that you may have life abundantly*. Their vision, from Acts, is that abundant life. Imagine if the whole world could live that way and not just the group in the bubble or a series of bubbles around the back. And of course the church did so, and is worldwide - but by no means perfect. We are all human and we have much to learn.

The second reading also, leading up to *I came to give you life abundantly*, speaks of Jesus as the shepherd. It's not a story about farming. It's not about being a shepherd and it's not about sheep. It is about leadership: *I'm your leader you can follow me you can trust me*. And the image of Shepherd was the same image given to kings and leaders of the past - and those who would give advice to the people.

Jesus identified himself as the Good Shepherd - and other voices they might hear that would draw them away from that community, that uncommonly wonderful good community, into other ways - as robbers, thieves.

Jesus also talked about himself as the gate. So we shouldn't get too stuck on the Shepherd image because immediately, he self identifies as the gate. *I am the gate, I'm the way, I'm the one that will help you find your way; take this direction, follow me*. A strong message, interestingly enough, leading up to him moving to Jerusalem and the crucifixion.

These are not in chronological order. But then very many of the stories aren't. They tell us pictures of what could be, what is, what is possible and how we might find our way there. That's how these two stories, these two texts, fit together this week.

Jesus also talks about the voices: *I am the Shepherd, I am the gate, hear my voice, you know my voice, follow me. You will know the other voices. Don't follow them* - was something of the message in that. And I think of the many voices that are around us these days. Voices encouraging us to stay home - and we know them as good voices. Voices encouraging us to go out and work and make a living - and they are good voices. Voices saying enough! I can't cope with this anymore. My mental health is at its extreme tension.

How do we listen to all of the conflicting voices when each has something good in them? Sometimes we need to see a bigger picture while holding onto little parts. It's no wonder that it feels hard sometimes. Often for some.

We've had people for whom this time of isolation that we're living in now with Covid 19 has not really changed their life much - except they're working harder and longer - and then need to isolate when they go home! So they don't have the support they might need because they are essential workers. And haven't we - and aren't we - grateful for their work. Often work that is overlooked because they work at night and behind the scenes. And at times when we are so weak we don't necessarily see their work, their strengths.

I think of the other voices that might be around the world right now. Voices crying out for justice, voices crying out for revenge, someone wanting to pin the blame on someone for things happening or not happening. Politicians trying to do the right thing and being condemned at every point. Some being found to be good, but always that little niggling something on the side. We're pretty good, aren't we, human beings, at pointing fault, making trouble.

Some of the voices might be ones that will call us into new places in the future. New places, new ways of living, because the old ways have taken us in directions we don't need to return to.

And then there'll be voices in the back of our mind saying: *Ah, but the way it used to be.*

So many voices.

We have voices of children in the streets (and we might hear more of that next week) crying out for justice in the world; and for the care of the land.

And the economy? Well the economy is a balance of all of those things: the well-being of the people, the well-being of the land, and the well-being of all the structures and businesses that work together to make that work.

There are many voices.

May we hear the voices clearly and learn to discern them well and know the one that is calling us: the gate, the Shepherd, is the one who is with us always to help us do that.

God bless you