

Pentecost People

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on Pentecost Sunday, May 23rd, 2021)

How much had changed since that first Easter when the disciples gathered. They have now emerged from their fear and hiding and are actively out and about sharing God's good news. They have gathered for the Jewish Festival of Weeks, which was held fifty days after the Passover. It was a harvest festival, a time of giving thanks to God for the harvest and offering back to him the first fruits of that harvest in thanksgiving. That is why there were so many people from many places gathered in Jerusalem that day

Thousands we are told heard the message, and about three thousand we are told later in this chapter in Acts, responded to the message and were baptised.

These three thousand symbolise the first fruits of the church. Despite the chaos, bewilderment and amazement of the crowd and the accusation of drunkenness and perhaps even insanity, thousands of people heard the message of God's love in words that they could understand. There was something fascinating about these people that drew others to them, that somehow harnessed their excitement and enthusiasm.

We have in our Scripture a variety of images of the Spirit. The Spirit is manifested in many ways and in many people throughout the Scripture. The Spirit is described as truth, as peace, as a guide, as an advocate, that by which God adopts us into his family. In our reading from Acts we find images of wind, fire and language.

Wind – it can be gentle or fierce, it blows where it will and is unseen yet moves things.

Fire – it can be warm and make us feel cosy, it can also be unstoppable and uncontrollable.

Language – God's Spirit empowers the disciples to speak of the good news to all who had come into the city in words, symbols and actions that they could understand. It's not that all of sudden there is a single language, but rather, people being able to understand one another despite speaking different languages. Each hears in their own language, understands within their own frameworks of understanding and no one is excluded.

In our reading from Galatians, Paul describes the ways in which the gift of the spirit of might be experienced or made manifest. He describes it as the fruit of the Spirit.

Today we celebrate Pentecost. Today we celebrate the birth of the church.

The first Pentecost People came from everywhere and shared a common understanding, they were excited, enthusiastic, they listened, they understood and they were baptised. Later in the book we are told how they ate together, how they shared what they had with each other, how they prayed together and how they worshipped. That first experience of God as the promised Spirit amongst them, transformed them.

We too are Pentecost People. We too are gifted by the same Spirit for the task of making others aware of God's love for them.

I wonder if I can share another image with you, as a way of understanding what that first Pentecost was like.

Let's think about dandelions. Dandelions are really just little yellow weeds that seem to pop up everywhere. Most people try to remove them from their lawns but they still pop up in the most unusual places, cracks in the concrete, for example. They don't need great soil and really, they are as common as muck. After a while this little yellow weed

transforms itself into a white fluffy ball that children love to pick and blow and make wishes on.

Dandelions are a wonderful picture of life in the Spirit. Let me tell you why. Each dandelion is really many tiny flowers bunched together. Once it blooms each tiny flower produces a seed and this seed is attached to a stem with white fluffy threads – hence the white fluffy ball we see. These seeds are then carried away by the wind and travel like tiny parachutes – so depending on the strength of the wind they can travel many miles from the parent plant.¹

These seeds scatter everywhere and begin growing in their new places very quickly.

So why are they are good image for life in the Spirit²

- a) They are ordinary, common, down to earth.
- b) Each dandelion is made up of many flowers, clustered together, they are interdependent, they are unified but individuals too.
- c) They transform; they change into something else – from yellow flowers to fluffy white balls ready to be used to spread their message/essence.
- d) They allow themselves to be carried away on the wind.
- e) They spread like wildfire.
- f) They spring up in unlikely and sometimes inhospitable places.
- g) They are cheerful, resilient and subversive.

The first Pentecost had people gathered in one place where they heard the message of God's love in their own language and then sent them out throughout the world to proclaim that message.

Each and every disciple including us is like one of those little flowers that make up the dandelion and is transported elsewhere by the wind to grow and produce more dandelions.

Maybe we need to we see ourselves as being just like dandelions. Being changed and transformed by God to go and share his message of love in the most unlikely places carried always on his wings of love. Let us be unofficial flowers (as that is what a weed is) which travel light on the winds of the Spirit and spring up in the most unlikely places. Perhaps we can think of ourselves as white fluffy balls on which God blows and makes a wish.

From now until November we will find ourselves in the season of Pentecost. In that time, I pray we all and as a community might be able to in both word and deed share God's love in ways that are practical, that are easy for others to understand and relevant to their world.

With God's Spirit as our enabler, may we love with a love that has no partiality. May we share in the joy of others or bring joy to them in their moments of sadness. May we sow seeds of peace where there is conflict within or between people, between countries, between religions. May we show patience with others, with ourselves and with God – giving space for understandings to grow. May all we do be done with kindness, treating

¹ Taken from information on the Internet – “Thinking Fountain – Science Museum of Minnesota”

² For this section I have used “Once Upon a Time – Story Sermons for Children” by John Timmer, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1992, p. 139 & “Dandelions and Thistles – Biblical Meditations from the Iona Community” edited by Jan Sutch Pickard, Wildgoose Publications, Glasgow, 1999.

the other as we would like to be treated. May we be generous with all we have, sharing with others whose need might be greater both on a micro scale and as a nation. May we have faith in God, in each other, and our selves – trusting each other and God. In all our actions may we be gentle – not harsh and abrasive but soft and comforting. May we have self-control – may we know when enough is enough – enough said, enough possessed – may we know when to stop. In short may we have the fruit of the Spirit.

Pentecost reminds us of God who is Spirit and is creative, life giving and working in and through us no matter our race, language or nation to bring others to a knowledge of his love for the world. Might we be Pentecost people. Amen.