

The Community of the Spirit

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on Pentecost Sunday June 5th 2022 – Acts 2, John 14, Romans 8 & Galatians 5)

Welcome to Pentecost Sunday.

Welcome to the celebration of the day that marks the beginning of the growth of the church, that movement from a little band of disciples to a world-wide movement. It is the day the people had a very real experience of God's spirit in their midst. It is the day people understood the core message, that of God's love for all in ways they understood.

Pentecost is the Greek word for the Festival of Weeks, which was a Jewish Festival that was celebrated about fifty days after the Passover. This festival was a kind of harvest festival, where they would offer back to God the first fruits of the harvest in thanksgiving. This is why so many people from so many different places had gathered. It must have been chaotic, busy, loud, confusing, as people tried to communicate and understand each other,

It was here in the midst of all of this, that God, as Spirit was experienced in a tangible way. Peter and his mates stood up and started to tell the people about God's great deeds. The crowd thought they were drunk, or perhaps just a little bit crazy, however they all seemed to hear in ways they could understand – all about God's love for the world, everyone heard, everyone was included.

In our service today we have celebrated in our songs, prayer and readings the way in which God's promised presence, the Spirit, the advocate, is with us.

God's Spirit is experienced like wind – that which is both gentle and fierce, that blows where it will, is unseen but moves things.

It is experienced like fire – warm and cosy, and yet unstoppable and uncontrollable.

It is experienced like language – one is able to understand the message of love in ways that make sense to them, there is a sense in which people know they are loved.

For John, she is experienced like an advocate, one who is on your side, standing up for you. She is both a teacher and speaker of truth, helping you know what matters most. She will remind you of Jesus and all that is important to remember about his life and his teachings.

The book of Romans, reminds us that it is by God's Spirit that we become brother and sisters, the family of God. It is God's Spirit that brings us into the fold, as adopted children, equal heirs to all that God gives.

You can find many other images, symbols, understandings of God's presence as Spirit with us. throughout Scripture. Always though God's Spirit is creating, unifying and forgiving.

Each of us has received God's Spirit, and Paul in Galatians lists some of the ways in which God's people are gifted with the Spirit. Each gift is given in order to build

community, to be used for the common good. Given so that the world might know and understand God's love.

Let's remind ourselves of these gifts of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are the gifts of God's Spirit given to us, not that we all have each of them, but together we have these gifts and it is the using of them that creates community. And such gifts rub off. Last week I was speaking to an old friend who I hadn't spoken to in years, this person is a gentle and wise man. He is always encouraging and builds you up. As we talked, I noticed my behaviour also changed, I became more gentle, it was easier to express my gratitude to him and encourage him in his work. After we finished our conversation (and we had been discussing an issue that I had been quite emotional, even angry about) I found myself calmer. Is not this, what happens in the church, in the family of God, in the community of the Spirit? – we each help each other be what we can be.

Shortly we will welcome four people into formal membership of the church, adopting them into this community of faith and I have no doubt our life together will be enriched by who they are, by the gifts God has given them to use for the common good, we will be enriched by the gift of God they are to us.

As I reflect on my own simple understandings of how and who God by his Spirit is present with us – as advocate, as truth, as peace, as hope, as wind, as fire, as language, as teacher, as enabler, as encourager, I can see that all of this is about building community, both amongst us but also drawing others in to be the people of God.

So, you the community of the Spirit here in Footscray, go and live as the adopted children who are loved by God and called to spread that love into the whole world, equipped by the gift of God's Spirit, God's very presence in our midst.