

The Spirit of ...

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church, May 19th, 2024, – Acts 2, John 16 & Galatians 5)

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Pentecost Sunday – the day we celebrate the birth of the church.

The disciples have 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 God 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, this was an inclusive experience, no one was left out. There was something fascinating about these people that drew others to them, that somehow harnessed their excitement and enthusiasm.

There are many more images and symbols for the Holy Spirit in our Scriptures.

Wind, Fire, Kindness, Gentleness, Creativity, Dove

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.

I want us to spend some time pondering how we understand and experience God as Spirit in our lives. On the handout¹ are some short phrases that suggest the ways in which God is present with us. Spend a short time reading them and noticing which one speaks to you.

God of all beginnings

God of endings

Eternal light of God

Warm breath of God

Melting touch of God

Healing hand of God

Safe sheltering of God

Liberating challenge of God

Graciousness of God

Creative love of God

Breath of the universe

Craftsman of the heavens

Life-loving Spirit

Renewer of strength

Breaker-down of walls of division

Source of all life

Inspirer of peacemakers

Inspirer of seekers after truth

Inspirers of workers for humanity

Giver of joy

Giver of comfort

Giver of peace

Giver of wisdom

Giver of right judgement

Giver of good counsel

Giver of awe and wonder

Giver of love Spirit of justice

Spirit of righteousness

Spirit of power

Spirit of integrity

Spirit of mercy

Spirit of compassion

Spirit of perfection

¹ Taken from 'Fire and Bread' by Ruth Burgess, Wild Goose Publications, UK, Reprinted 2015 p.172-174,

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Spirit of generosity

Spirit of exuberance

Spirit of invitation

Spirit of hope without horizon

Spirit of gladness

Divine Wind, Breath of God, as a whisper on the breeze, a wind dancing in the treetops, an exhilarating wind of the clifftops, so we sense you.

- Where and how do you see God's Spirit active in your life?

Now in small groups share any insights you would like to share and then as a group try and answer the following questions.

- Where and how do you see God's Spirit active in the world?
- Where and how do you see God's Spirit active in the church?
- Where do you pray God's Spirit might move in the world, the church and your life next?

If you would prefer to just sit and think by yourself, feel free to write, draw or pray as you reflect on how the God's spirit is present in your life. I have some flame templates for you to use to write or draw on.

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, generous, that are easy for others to understand and relevant to their world. We are Pentecost People!