

For the Common Good

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on Pentecost Sunday, May 24th, 2026 – Acts 2:1-11 & 1 Cor 12: 4-14)

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Welcome to Pentecost.

Pentecost is the day we mark the birth of the Christian church. Happy Birthday everyone.

Our reading from the book of Acts, is the book that records the works of the apostles, disciples, followers of Jesus after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In the reading we have today we see those first disciples emerging from their hiding and beginning to tell of the works of Jesus.

They are gathered with many others from many places in the known world, celebrating the Festival of Weeks, which was held about seven weeks after the Passover. Initially it was a kind of harvest festival where people brought the first harvest of their crops as an act of thanksgiving to God. Later it became a festival celebrating Moses bringing the stone tablets down the mountain containing the Law. Christians began to celebrate Pentecost fifty days after Easter as the giving of the Spirit.¹

It tells of the way the people experienced God's Spirit in their midst. The Acts reading we have before us speaks of wind, fire and language or communication, it speaks of them experiencing God's Spirit in their midst. It speaks of their bewilderment, their amazement, their astonishment.

Have you ever stood in an underground railway station waiting for a train? The first sign of the train arriving is the wind you feel standing on the platform, well before you see the train and just before you hear it arriving.²

The Hebrew word for Spirit is the word that means wind or breathe – 'ruach'. God breathes and the human race is created. As an aside the word 'ruach' is feminine.

Similarly, the Greek word for Spirit – 'pneuma', also means wind or breath.

Those gathered on that first Pentecost day experienced God's Spirit in significant ways, described as wind and language.

Wind, in poem by Bill Loader³ might be described as:

¹ This information sourced from Sr Mary Coloe, 'The Signs of the Spirit in our lives – Faithguides: Pentecost', Garratt Publishing

² *ibid*

³ Wind, wind - a reflection on the Spirit by Bill Loader

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*Wind, wind,
you come from nothingness and go to nothingness,
and when you are still,
there is nothing we see, nothing we hear,
and you surround us in our not seeing and not knowing.*

And then:

*Wind, wind, wondrous wind,
hovering at the birth of creation,
whisking secretly among the wonders of new life,
bearing the seed, lifting high the heads of mighty trees,
swirling among the grasses, celebrating life.*

And a bit further on:

*Wind, gentle wind,
wind of our breathing, our life, our hope,
renewing, refreshing,
sighing in our stress,
moaning in our pain,
still in our dying.*

Loader's description of how wind is experienced, I think really helps us to understand how we might experience God's Spirit.

I have another Image which might also be useful – a dandelion. Dandelions are really just little yellow weeds that seem to pop up everywhere. They don't need great soil and 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. 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.⁴

Dandelions are a wonderful picture of life in the Spirit⁵ and perhaps mirror what happened at Pentecost. Dandelions are ordinary and made up of many flowers clustered together, interdependent, unified and yet individual. They are transformed into white fluffy balls ready to be used to spread and share their essence and message. Carried on

⁴ Taken from information on the Internet – "Thinking Fountain – Science Museum of Minnesota"

⁵ 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.

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the wind they spring up in unlikely and inhospitable places, where they show themselves to be cheerful, resilient and subversive.

Isn't that a little like how the Spirit encourages and enables us to spread the message of God's love.

The other way in which people experienced God's Spirit was through language. Their own language, in ways they could make sense of what was being said. I don't want to try and explain how people heard in their own language – perhaps people translated for others or understood the 'vibe' or understood gestures and signs.

What I want to concentrate on, is, what language does. It communicates, it provides a shared meaning and understanding. I think Paul in his letter to Corinthians gives us some guidance about the kind of language we need to use to communicate the gospel and how the Spirit might enable and guide us.

Paul tells us that we too are gifted the Spirit, as well and what those gifts might be and their purpose. The gifts of the Spirit are given for a simple purpose: to build up the kingdom, the community and to be used for the common good.

The first thing to note is there is a variety of services and activities that the Spirit enables, no one person has a monopoly on any one, it is through the use of all of them enabled by the Spirit that we will build the kingdom of God, that we will start to achieve the common good.

A quick look at the list he gives, we see a number that relate to clear communication:

- Wisdom & Knowledge – knowing what we think, not offering confusing utterances and certainly not telling people what they should think, rather allowing them to come to their own conclusions.
- Prophecy – more like speaking truth to power rather than predicting the future.
- Discernment – telling the difference between right and wrong.
- Speaking and interpreting – speaking in ways that help people understand in ways they get, it probably means ditching the jargon we so often use and simplifying what we say.

These are about communicating the love of God, in ways that are compassionate, understandable and meaningful. These gifts are given by the guiding and enabling Spirit.

Others will be given the ability to engage in the work of healing and action, perhaps more practical ways of communicating the gospel of love.

So, people of Footscray gifted by the Spirit, go out like dandelions, allowing God's Spirit to transform you and carry you into unlikely places where you communicate God's love in both word and action for the good of all. Amen.