



Pentecost
Rev Cate Thorn
Year A, Pentecost
Acts 2: 1-21; John 7: 37-39
28 May 2023

I fear this week I am to preach a most unlikely and unrealistic sermon. Although I may be in good company with the dancing flame, violent wind story of Pentecost, in fact with quite a few of the biblical stories.

Pentecost we celebrate in red, yellow and orange swirling colour, with song and candle, rushing wind, tongues of fire, many and varied languages spoken and heard. Spirit outpouring upon the community gathered together in one place. Those, we might presume, who were directed to return to Jerusalem by the men dressed in white who appeared before the standing mouth agape disciples looking heavenward as Jesus ascended. The gathered together, waiting, with joy, faithfully worshiping and blessing God people.

The way the story goes, the Easter, Easter tide, Ascension and now Pentecost story goes, is that Jesus, who we now say revealed God presence in human form in the world was killed, put to death. Perhaps an act of political expediency, it was best to destroy the evidence, just in case. Even so afterward something broke through, a figure recognised as Jesus by those who'd known him, recognisable if changed. Before long this Jesus' half known, mostly recognised went from them, was lifted up heavenward they say and Jesus' disciples, followers, supporters, women and men were left to their bare bones reality in the aftermath.

For some reason this year, thinking of this, the imagery of the Ezekiel dry bones story popped into my head. As if the after Ascension bare bones community were being knit together as a body through the worship and blessing of God in the temple. And today it's the Pentecost violent wind, breath of life that enlivens this body of Jesus followers, enlivens the bare bones, sinew bound, flesh clad body of followers to be, become, step into being the body of Christ in the world. This is why today is named the birthday of the church, the day she was brought to birth in the world.

It speaks of a community in transition, as we are here. A time to gather in worship, full of thanks for this place, to consider the good bones of St Matthew's and to open ourselves to receive, to learn where the enlivening Spirit of God, is blessing and leading and sending us.

I can't help but wonder, though, to what end this Spirit empowering blows. We stand in the story that says humans can express God presence in the world. Can we actually get our heads around this, the impact of this upon us, the effect of this on what and who for and how we live. For it tells us something about who we are, that we are to express divine priority in our life, work, the being of our doing.

And it is upon the **gathered community** the Spirit outpours, on **each of them** divided tongues dance. **All** in and of our community are needed for us to fully express God blessing presence in and beyond this place. The unity of this community, which Diana spoke of last week, is expressed in the diversity of tongues and comprehending ears.

Yet, what is it that we're to speak, to act, to influence for the good in what seems a jaded, worn down, disrupted, bent on self-destruction world? With all due humility, will we acknowledge that our collective effort to change the world for the better isn't going so well? Accept that doing the same we've always done, even if we were to try harder, do faster, have the best, most noble will in the world isn't and won't change anything? If it were to, surely we'd have seen some sign of it by now.

Dare we ask whether Jesus' coming, dying, resurrecting, Spirit outpouring has changed anything much about the prevailing power dynamics that demean and diminish our world. It certainly hasn't fulfilled our expectations of what is meant to happen, if God's in charge.

Are we missing something here?

What are we not seeing?

The divine Spirit blessing poured out at Pentecost upon those gathered is abundantly indiscreet. It doesn't check whether they've got everything right, or even that they've any much idea what right looks like. It doesn't pause to ensure everything's correct, in order and with the program much less that there's someone on hand who knows what's actually going on.

Divine life-bringing blessing comes, is poured out on us, in the broken, bleak jadedness of our world, on who we are, as we are, where we are. We don't have to be good enough, or noble enough, or committed enough to receive. It **is** our choice to accept, to choose to open ourselves for blessing.

Imagine what our world would look like if we all stopped pretending we had to be someone or something we're not, let ourselves experience our vulnerability. Opened ourselves to receive the divine blessing poured into us, the divine blessing of each other, the divine blessing of creation. Opened and stepped into that.

What a crazy thought, crazy mad idea that we would allow ourselves to be that vulnerable, to live so vulnerably, so needfully.

I know, I told you, crazy idea, too unrealistic. But let me share with you some of what has arisen in course of conversations this last week or two. As part of the restoration and remediation process for people affected by this year's flooding in Tamaki Makaurau, a series of public meetings have been convened. They've been held within each of the different worst affected communities. What has been noticed is the marked and stark difference of response between those communities to their situation. Not unreasonable you'd think,

they are different, however there are similarities also. Those in the most vulnerable communities, who've little and now almost nothing rarely, if ever complain. Rather they come to ask how they can help, often aware of what's caused the flooding, they want to know how they can contribute collectively to create solutions. Those in the communities of greater privilege, who've lost perhaps not their first house, come looking to blame and seeking remedial compensation.

May it be that knowing our vulnerability causes us to reach out and this engenders collective life, releases resources and creates abundance. But with privilege we become self-dependent, isolate and protect ourselves and so withdraw from collective dependency and contribution.

Today we extinguish the Paschal Candle, for the fifty days of Easter have now passed. But before we do we'll light a smaller candle from it and carry it with us as we recess from this service. It is a symbol to us that we now are to join with those who also bear such light, take such trembling, flickering flame into the world, to nurture, feed and sustain the fire of divine blessing that permeates our world. It's in vulnerability and needfulness we open to accept and entrust ourselves to the abundantly indiscreet over flowing Spirit of God, as we do so we release our resourcefulness for the world.