

Transcript | 31 May 2020

Pentecost Celebration



THE AUSTRALIA
TERRITORY

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Acknowledgment of Country

Opening prayer

Based on Acts 2, John 14

Amazing God,
you call us today,
just as you called the disciples
on the Day of Pentecost.
You challenge and support us,
revealing the brokenness of our communities;
giving us the peace that our world needs.
You point us to the pain of the cross,
and then remind us of the joy of the resurrection.
Transform us, O God,
through the power of your Holy Spirit.
Help us breathe deeply
of the Breath of Life.
Blow through our worship
and change our lives forever. Amen.

Note: Adapted from
a prayer by Laura
Jaquith Bartlett on
Ministry Matters

2020 Prayer initiative

Major Barry Casey

Today, on behalf of our Territorial Leaders, I have the privilege of launching a significant national prayer initiative.

This initiative, which is entitled 'pray it forward', is a call out to every Salvo across the nation to enter a period of 21 days of intentional prayer and prophetic listening, as we begin to reimagine and redefine the way God is calling us to operate post-Covid.

There will be themes to guide you in your praying, but we do not want this to be prescriptive. We want it to be natural, organic and authentic.

We want – no – we need – a mighty moving of the Spirit across our army, that will allow us the courage to deepen our conviction to be all he has raised us up to be in the days, months, and years ahead. We want to be a strong, united voice – boldly praying it forward; praying for courage to stop doing the things that have been unfruitful in the past, to embrace the new things God is revealing, and continue those things that are bearing the fruit of transformed lives.

How appropriate is it that today – Pentecost Sunday, is the day we launch into this season of prayer? The day the Holy Spirit came with power upon God's people, releasing them to speak his message of hope and grace with boldness and without fear.

So mighty Spirit, come once again with Pentecostal power and pour into us a Spirit of discernment, power, boldness, and courage – to allow us to prune not only the dead branches, but also the fruitful ones, so that we can produce even greater kingdom fruit. And we pray this forward - believing in the mighty name of Jesus.

Prayer of Intercession

By Rev. Joanna Harader

Let us speak in tongues of comfort to those weeping over the bodies of their loved ones
shot by troubled gunmen, killed in border clashes, dying from coronavirus.

Let us speak in tongues of courage to those living in fear
of the next shooting, the next bomb, the illness that threatens.

Let us speak in tongues of condemnation
against laws and policies that promote violence,
prioritizing the preferences of some over the lives of others.

Let us speak in tongues of care
for the most vulnerable in our world—
human beings, animals, and ecosystems.

Let us speak in tongues of love
for you and for your people,
that Your language might be our language.

And when our tongues are still,
when we have no words to speak,
let our hearts burn with your fire,
let our ears hear your words in our own native tongue,
let our skin feel the wind of your Spirit—
a mighty wind, blowing where it will.
Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who is in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom,
and the power and the glory.
Forever, Amen.

Pentecost and reconciliation

Lieut. Colonel Lyn Edge

I found myself in Bunnings recently, to buy yet more supplies for my husband Terry's woodwork hobby.

As we approached the checkouts, I noticed a lot of fire pits for sale – seems that with people spending every night at home – backyard fire pits and campfires are more popular than ever.

Facebook is filled with so many pictures of people staring into the flames.

Fire is fascinating when it is controlled. But we don't have to remember too far back, when fire was not an enjoyable evening activity, but a fearsome and deadly disaster.

Fire – it's fascinating and powerful – and the central image of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit is said to have fallen on the early Christian community like fire from the heavens.

The first Pentecost came to a world divided. Divided by empire, language and culture – and into that world came the fascinating and powerful impact of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost is a celebration of coming together, of reconciliation between people and God and people with each other. We are invited to re-enact and live out Pentecost reconciliation afresh in our communities and contexts today.

This week, Australia commemorates National Reconciliation Week, and it seems to me that Pentecost and Reconciliation week form a beautiful fusion.

National Reconciliation Week was initiated in 1996 by Reconciliation Australia, to celebrate Indigenous history and culture in Australia and foster reconciliation in our nation.

Today, we join that celebration and the shaping Australia's journey towards a more just, equitable and reconciled nation.

Over these past 20 years, there has been greater acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights to land and sea; understanding of the impact of government policies and frontier conflicts; and an embracing of stories of Indigenous success and contribution.

Reconciliation is a journey for all Australians – as individuals, families, communities, organisations and importantly, as a nation.

In an article in Others this month, Uncle Vince Ross, our beautiful Salvation Army elder, reminds us that there are three key elements in this journey of reconciliation in Australia today.

Firstly, reconciliation needs a commitment to telling the truth about Australia – understanding, as he says, 'the good, the bad and the ugly' of our shared history. God is committed to shining the light on the truth and bringing it out into the open. This is essential in any healing process for individuals, families and for nations.

Secondly, reconciliation requires the building of relationships of trust and mutual respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This comes from spending time together, listening to one another, and sharing stories, or as our Indigenous sisters and brothers say, yarning together.

Finally, once we have built trust and confidence in our relationships, we can then work together as partners in our local communities. This is a great opportunity for Salvation Army mission expressions to work together in collaboration to live out our Strategic Initiative, which says we are committed to work to the mutual flourishing of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

This year's theme for Reconciliation Week was chosen before bushfires and before COVID-19 – but is incredibly fitting. The theme is “In This Together”.

If the past months have taught us anything, it is that our fates are inescapably tied to one another. We are truly in this together.

So, if you find yourself sitting around a fire pit one of these days, as you gaze at the fascinating and powerful flames, please pray that the Holy Spirit will come afresh in Australia; that the Holy Spirit will come and work in and through us to restore broken relationships and heal the wounds of racism and exclusion.

We are in this together – on our journey of reconciliation.

May it start with us this Pentecost day.

Bible reading

John 20:19-23

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again, Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Sermon

Lieut. Colonel Terry Grey

In these strange times that require many of us to remain at home, things can feel, well, a little bland. A bit like all the colour has been drained from the landscape of our lives.

Occasionally, we are hit by unexpected and unwelcome waves of anxiety – for ourselves, for our families, for our world.

We look for distractions to save us from the inner dialogue that chips away at our hope.

The story of Pentecost, as recounted by Luke, is certainly one that captures our attention and imaginations.

Its symbolism is typical of encounters with the divine that we find in the Old Testament

The bright colours of red, orange and yellows mesmerise the eye as we gaze into a crackling fire.

The overwhelming sounds of wind, powerful enough to whip the rooves off buildings and throw cars tumbling down the street.

The cacophony of confused languages that overwhelm and deafen the ear.'

There is no denying – like moths irresistibly attracted to a bright flame, we are drawn by all the excitement that such a scene offers.

Yet, on this Pentecost Sunday, the Gospel reading offers us another, perhaps less spectacular but nonetheless significant vision, of a life united with the Holy Spirit.

For John, the coming of the Spirit was always bound up with the cross and glorification of Jesus.

Earlier in his gospel, John writes:

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me,³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'³⁹ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

- JOHN 7:37-39.

John collapses together into one flowing movement, the events of the cross, the ascension, and the giving of the Holy Spirit, inviting his readers to view them together.

Behind sealed doors, apparently the broader group of Jesus' followers were in 'lock down' that evening.

It remains unclear exactly how, but Jesus turns up and greets them with traditional words שלום עליכם / *shālôm 'alêkem* / 'peace upon you.'

I suspect that, at least initially, there wasn't much chance of that happening. They were 'locked in' for fear of their lives.

Yet, through the disclosure of his hands and feet suggesting the marks that the crucifixion had left upon his body, the disciples recognised

that this was in fact Jesus among them!

How often does that happen?

I mean really.

For most of us, I suspect that the thought of 'Jesus being with us', of 'God's life being bound to our own' easily becomes something like background noise in our lives.

Because it is there all the time and we tune it out, we become unaware and sadly, immune to his life-forming presence. That is, of course, until we decide that we need him!

I mention this not so that we can add another failing with which to beat ourselves, but rather to recognise that this is in fact, the very human experience of many of us, including the disciples.

'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'

Then he does what is unthinkable in a time of social distancing - he deliberately breathes on them.

'Receive the Holy Spirit.'

The Holy Spirit is given to us because we are a people sent 'to be' and 'to do.'

What this looks like is something that cannot be predicted, for the life that we are called to adopt is unique.

It is a delicate fusion of our own personality, character, gifts and the divine life expressed within us, embracing those whom we encounter along the way.

Yet, this text does not leave us bereft of direction - far from it. It articulates the shape of a life lived in the Holy Spirit.

*'As the Father has sent **me**, so I send **you**,'* says Jesus.

So, if God's sending of Jesus becomes the pattern for our sending, what does this form of Spirit-inspired life look like?

If we had more time, we would attend the gospel stories, and perhaps see for ourselves how Jesus encountered people, how he treated them, how he rarely left them as they were, how he challenged the socially powerful and privileged, how he pleaded for and lived - **'love first.'**

His life was one marked by generosity, by self-giving, by risk taking, by grace bearing, by a preference for justice, and perhaps most importantly - by vulnerability.

The sending of Jesus to this form of life is ultimately only possible because this is a shared life - this life is also 'lived' by the One who does the sending - God, the Father.

This implies that this kind of life is the divine life.

This day of Pentecost reminds us that we are not alone, locked away behind closed doors from each other. We, like Jesus, are sent people who have received the Holy Spirit, and are called to bear the marks of the Christ life in how we choose to live.

I realise that there is a dissonance here.

What does it mean to be sent, in a time when physical isolation has become a lifesaving strategy?

Creativity and adaptation - let us find ways to support and connect. Look for ways to give and share life. Embrace opportunities that may come our way to spend ourselves for others

Jesus says, *'As the Father has sent me, so I send you'*. Likewise, to a life marked by generosity, by self-giving, by risk taking, by grace bearing, a preference for justice and by a vulnerability through which you embrace the world.

This is the divine life that has been breathed into us.

Sending Forth Prayer

Adapted from a prayer by Reverend Andrew Nunn

Ever present God,
be with us in our isolation,
be close to us in our distancing,
be healing in our sickness,
be joy in our sadness,
be light in our darkness,
be wisdom in our confusion,
be all that is familiar when all is unfamiliar,
that as the doors reopen
we may, with the zeal of Pentecost
inhabit our communities
and speak of your goodness
to an emerging world.
For Jesus' sake.
Amen.