

## Sermon Pentecost (Acts 2 and 1 Cor)

On the day of Pentecost, seven weeks after Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples were all gathered together in one place. The Holy Spirit descended on them and their lives were changed – and the Church was born.

In Acts chapter 2, we're given a list of the people who were present – there were Parthians and Medes and Elamites – and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Asia, Pamphylia and Egypt. (One could say that this was truly a multi-cultural gathering.) In a way, it looked a bit like the world that we live in today – it was multi-cultural – but the people were united by their shared faith and the grace of God.

And, looking at our congregation today, I think we see something similar – we see a gathering of people from a number of different places – we see the same cultural diversity. But, here we are – gathered together - part of this faith community – united now by our faith in the grace of God.

Yes, on the day of Pentecost, according to the book of Acts, the Spirit of the living God descended on the disciples and the crowd, gathered together from every nation of the world. And, as a consequence, the Church was born.

Again, this coming together – the formation of the Church was not unlike how our nation was formed – indigenous Australians living alongside those of us who moved here from somewhere else.

But, how did it happen – how did the Church form from such a diverse group of people?

Well, according to our reading, it was a miracle of hearing and understanding and conversion. We're told that culture and background provided no barrier to the hearing of the Gospel, on that day. (There were no favourites and no exclusions.)

Inspired by the Spirit, the Gospel cut through the barriers that so often divide us – it cut through our cultural differences – it was a message intended for everyone. (And, of course, the same holds true for us today.)

According to Acts, not everyone could hear the Gospel. Some dismissed that they heard as the ravings of drunkards. And, of course, it was Peter who then explained that they were not drunk, as some believed – but rather witnesses to the power of the Holy Spirit.

It was the Holy Spirit that enabled the people to hear the story of Christ, each in their own language (in their own context). And, ultimately, through Pentecost, it was the Holy Spirit that started to build the Church that we share today.

In the words of Paul - in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 12) - '...to each of us is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...' In other words, Paul reminds us that our experience of the Holy Spirit is the true foundation of our Church at Pentecost – not our liturgy or our theological language – it's not our place of origin – it's not even the prayer book. We are called to experience the Holy Spirit and receive the gifts of the Spirit – to help build up the Church – the body of Christ.

Paul tells us that the Spirit gives us power to serve the common good (that's how it's worded in Corinthians). Through the Spirit some will be given the gift of wisdom, some are gifted with knowledge, some are gifted with faith and some are given the gift of healing. (These are some of the gifts that I see here, in this parish – wisdom, knowledge, faith and healing.) To quote Paul – “...in the Spirit we are baptised into the body – Jews and Greeks, slaves and free – we are all made to drink of the Spirit.

Yes, today we gather to celebrate the birth of the Church. But, even more importantly, we gather to celebrate the Spirit moving within us – moving in our parish and moving in the wider world. As Paul reminds us, the Spirit is the source of all wisdom, all knowledge, all faith and all healing. But, it's even more that that – it's the grace of God beyond all understanding. For all writers and artists and poets living in the world today – it becomes our inspiration and our calling. For teachers and prophets and scholars of every age – the Spirit has inspired every insight and every truth that's ever been written.

For every small child who has ever been loved, the Spirit is a warm blanket or a hug or a bedtime story.

2000 years after that initial outpouring of the Spirit, we continue to listen to God's word, spoken through the Holy Spirit – spoken in our lives (our context).

It won't always be a perfect union – we won't always agree. After all, even the early church struggled with its divisions and quarrels. And yet, even with their differences, the Church continued to grow – it continued to serve the people.

Today, we are called to take our place in that Church – we too are called to experience the power of the Spirit – and serve the common good. And, in doing so, we help to build the Church brick by brick – person by person.

Like our brothers and sisters in the early Church, we seek to build a Church of love and understanding and tolerance and hope. (We build a Church that provides a context for everyone. And yes, I think we see evidence of that Church here in Bayswater – we see it in our worship and prayer groups – in our hospitality – in the care we offer to the elderly in our nursing homes – in our care for the sick.

These are the languages of our faith, inspired by the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our interests within the Church – including our future work and activity – the plans that we make and the ministry that we will build – these become the different languages that we use to express our faith – built on our experience of the Spirit and the gifts that are given.

The Spirit language that we use today is the language of compassion and understanding and tolerance and hope. As the book of Acts clearly shows us, the language of the Holy Spirit is universal and inclusive. And, our response, inspired by the same Spirit, needs to be equally universal and inclusive.

Regardless of our differences, in our presence here today, we are one – one body united by one Spirit. Jesus said to his disciples ‘by this shall all people know that you are my disciples, that you love one another’

Love within us and love between us – this surely is the language of the Spirit at Pentecost.

Gathered here today, I pray that the voice of the Holy Spirit will be clearly heard by all of us – I pray that we will be moved to respond in languages that give meaning to our lives – I pray that we too will be flexible, inclusive, tolerant and hopeful.

The Lord be with you.