

God Everywhere

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 20 May 2018

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Dr Margaret Mayman

Pentecost B

Ezekiel 37 (selected verses); Acts 2: 1-18

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <http://www.pittstreetuniting.org.au/> under "Sunday Gatherings" tab

Them bones, them bones, them dry bones, don't you hear the word of the Lord?

As the prophet Ezekiel heard the promise of God's breath bringing to life a defeated people, exiled from their country and their religion; as Jesus' people heard the wind, and felt the breath of God; as they saw the tongues of fire that would enlighten and enliven them to continue the mission of healing, forgiving and bringing the dead back to life -- assuring them that they were not alone even though Jesus was dead and gone - so may we also hear the word of our God.

God's breath enlivening the bones of the exiled; and God's breath in wind and fire, awakening the followers of Jesus to the truth – that God is everywhere, that life is sacred. That the earth is sacred. That you are sacred.

In baptising Mark and Allison this morning – we will say to them: *"you give God a way of coming to expression. You live in God and God lives in you."*

At Pentecost we celebrate this God who is everywhere, not something seen with our eyes but known with our minds and our hearts.

This Spirit everywhere, in the earth, in everyone; this truth has been known by the Aboriginal people of Australia since the Dreamtime. It is a story told in bones, and carried in the breath of sacred stories, from generation to generation.

About 42,000 years ago a young woman lived on the shores of what is now a dry lake basin, in an area of New South Wales we know as Mungo National Park. Her people had lived there for generations, collecting food from the land and the lake; nourishing their culture and teaching their children the traditions and spirituality of the people.

In 1969 an eroding spirit wind revealed her bones; bones buried so long ago that our minds can barely comprehend that span of time.

When this young woman, who scientists called Mungo Lady, died, we know her family mourned her. Her body was cremated, the remaining bones were crushed and burned again, then buried in what is now the lunette.

The bones of a man from the same period were discovered five years later. Mungo Man's bones showed traces of ochre which had been painted on his body and sprinkled on the grave.

Their community's rituals of death, that are known to us through the technologies of archaeological dating, have revealed that for tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal people have known what our Jewish ancestors in faith came to know, that there is more to our lives than what we can see and touch: that there is Spirit, Divine Presence; that God is everywhere permeating existence in the past, the present and the future.

In this awareness of the Sacred, we glimpse the meaning of ourselves, our relationships in family and our communities, the human and the non-human, including the land and the water that make up the sacred earth.

Pentecost is often referred to as the birthday of the church. We celebrate the agency of the disciples and the broader community of women and men who followed Jesus during his life and knew him again in a deeper, more mysterious way after his horrifying death on the cross at the hands of the Roman Empire, with the complicity of the religious establishment.

Those faithful disciples and their followers were faithful Jews looking for a Jewish messiah; and for a time after his death, they were lost and afraid.

When they sensed the Spirit, they became prophets of a more universal experience of God; an experience that was rooted in the exilic prophetic traditions of the Hebrew Bible.

Pentecost is an affirmation of the mystery of the Divine Presence actively present, here and everywhere, in Allison and Mark, in everyone here, in everyone everywhere from the Dreamtime to our time.

We celebrate Pentecost not because an institution was born, but because we believe that our world desperately needs a faith, a spirituality, that connects people to one another in trusting and compassionate relationships, that breaks down the walls that religious institutions and political states have created between us.

At Pentecost walls are broken down, and borders are opened up. Division, fear and suspicion are overcome.

In the story of Jesus' people, Pentecost was the moment of enlightenment that dawned when they realised that Jesus' death was not the end of Jesus. From the time of his execution, they had been trying to make sense of it all, and they did that by re-membering him.

They remembered him as someone who allowed the Spirit of God to move in his life, who willingly let God come to expression in him. They saw God in his life, in what he said and what he did.

And in this time of remembering, at Easter and at Pentecost, it dawned, as the breath of God brought Jesus back to life for them, that all human beings bring God's presence to visibility. They realized that this is what life and connectedness with God and with one another is about!

As Christians we believe that Jesus allowed the Spirit of God to come to expression in him as fully as any human person could. His life demonstrates for us what happens when a human person does this.

Jesus revealed to us who we really are – beings who are loved by God, beings who give God a way of coming to expression; he revealed that we live in God and God lives in us.

In the telling of this Christian story we name the Spirit present everywhere, in all people, in the development of cultures, in differing religious notions and understandings of human connection with the Divine Presence.

Australian theologian Michael Morwood has pointed out that over time the church lost or suppressed this wonderful vision of human life, in favour of a story telling us that every person on this planet is born into a state of separation from God. He says that Christianity enshrined and institutionalized a theological scheme of separation, dependence on the powers of clergy - and distance from God.

Yet the early Christian insight was truly catholic, small 'c' catholic, in its understanding that all people live in God and God in them, people of every race, colour, sexuality, nation, gender, religion and culture; that all people could find common ground as they work for the common good.

In this, is the meaning and purpose of being human on earth. In this, is the impetus to live in harmony, and to live sustainably and justly on earth, with all of life, grounded in the love of the God who first loved us.

The early church gave us gifts which we celebrate today. As the cultures of Mungo Man and Mungo Woman ritualised the value of human life being more than what could be seen and known, we have gifts of ritual in the sacraments of baptism and communion which invite us to understand ourselves as 'temples of the Holy Spirit' in community with others who are likewise touched by the Divine.

In the sacraments we are seeking the wholeness of not being divided from God, the ground of our being; the wholeness of not being divided from our fellow creatures on earth; the wholeness of not being divided in our selves where our words say one thing and our lives communicate another.

Baptism and communion are moments, events, experiences, which demonstrate the quality of this wholeness, of being undivided. Baptism and communion are the divine and the human encountering one another. They are the promise of what we yearn for.

We are not pilgrims on a journey to an elsewhere God. God is here, and here we are invited to open ourselves, to know this truth: to affirm that the Mystery we name "God" is actively present in all places, in all people, at all times, and to affirm the recognition that our world desperately needs religious, spiritual and ethical beliefs and spiritual practices that connect people and earth.

May the dry bones live. May God's people breathe deeply

and know that we, too,

are bearers of God's Spirit.