

Pentecost

The images of the Spirit found in the Bible are all very elemental – wind, water, fire – which suggests power. The power that was manifest in the creation: the Spirit like breath that moved over the waters at the beginning; the flames of fire which rested above each head like the fiery beginnings of the earth; and the Spirit like rivers of water that pour out of the faithful heart.

In likening the Spirit to the elements that make up the created world we are reminded that the Spirit is ancient, ever present, uncontained by mere human history and uncontrolled by our ideas and demands. That the Spirit was present in the creative process. That the Spirit pre-exists our particular lives and will continue after our small spirit has ebbed and flowed. That we are in a sense bathed in and surrounded by the Spirit as we are by water when we swim in the ocean. That we are sustained and surprised by the Spirit as we are by the breath that is contained in the wind that blows where it will. That we are warmed and confronted by the Spirit as we are by fire – the same element that warms us by the hearth on a winter's night and destroys all on a summer's day.

The Spirit of God has been woven into the very fabric of the created world and thus is always with us and accessible to us. It is not so much a new gift as a celebrating of the oldest gift of all. Many of us instinctively know that if we want to feel near to God we head into the great outdoors, that we still ourselves beside water, that we let the wind blow through and around us, that we draw near to the fire.

The Spirit of God in every generation and every place finds a way of making God's self known. Spirit seeks spirit as deep calls to the deep. The Spirit of God seeks our own spirit, desires communion, is restless until we rest in the arms of God and the divine rests in us. We were made by God and for God. God's desire for us does not seem to be limited by creed or race or gender or maybe even by species. As Creator and creature we are not at home until at oneness with one another.

And the purpose of the Spirit would seem to be to bind us together with God and with one another. Gifts of the Spirit are not given for the sake of entertainment or the glorification of the individual as are some physical and social gifts but that we might each grow into our fullness and live, work and love for the fulfilment of all others. Each of us playing our own small but essential part. Not as a chore or duty but as an expression of our truest selves. And when we are each our truest best selves then there shall be a power to become who we are intended to be, not only as individuals but as a people, a planet, a kingdom. The kingdom of God cannot be realised on earth until and unless we each take up our gift and be our God intended selves.

Nelson Mandela, who worked so long and so hard for a new world order in his home, in his inaugural speech, quoted a prayer written by Marianne Williamson. You may already know it.

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.
Your playing small does not serve the world.
There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking
so that other people won’t feel insecure around you.
We are all meant to shine, as children do.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God
that is within us.
It’s not just in some of us; it’s in everyone.
And as we let our own light shine,
we unconsciously give other people permission
to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear,
our presence automatically liberates others.”

Now it against the Australian way to claim any glory for ourselves so if all that shining and claiming our talent , gorgeousness and brilliance has made us nervous and suspicious – as maybe it should – then St Paul has a measure to help us discern what is of the Spirit of God and what is of ego. For in Galatians 5 he tells us “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.”

And so if Pentecost is to make sense to us then we need to remember that we are always in the embrace of the Spirit of God; that accessing the Spirit is as natural as breathing, swimming in the ocean, warming ourselves by the fire; and that we are to be our truest and best selves for our pleasure, our fulfilment, for the benefit of others and for the glory of God.

Even so, come Lord Jesus Christ.