

The Avenue Uniting Church

Sunday 19th May, 2024

"Colours of Pentecost"



Listening for Sacred Wisdom

Pentecost Story

Acts 2:1-12

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?"

Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about GOD's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

Anyway we look at it, this is a pretty amazing story!

Whether or not we read it literally, it's a story we should read seriously. It makes some big claims about the presence of the Holy Spirit being discovered in a new way by the early followers of Jesus.

(Before we go further, it's important to remember that "Pentecost" was a Jewish festival long before the early Christian movements took it up, and that the idea of GOD's Holy Spirit present among the people can clearly be seen in the Old Testament).

If we ask most people celebrating the Christian Pentecost story around the world today, what's special about it, I imagine that most answers would include the incredible images of the presence of the Holy Spirit: Fire, the strange languages, the wind/breath of GOD etc.

I'd agree with them, it's powerful and incredible stuff! But funnily enough, those aren't the images that came to mind for me when I started to think about Pentecost and what we might do together.

The phrase and image in my mind has been "colours of pentecost". And it's mostly been because of our candle: the one we call "*the Candle or Light of Christ in Community*"

I've lit this candle quite a few times more than usual lately: not only on Sundays, but also as we began funeral services here in the church. And when we do that, I often say that the light affirms our conviction that our life and death are held in the embrace of GOD.

That set me thinking about the colours we use in the making of our candle on Good Friday; of how the different shapes and colours represent our stories: sometimes shapes with sharp edges, - some big, some small – and the range of colours, from bright reds and yellows, through greens and purple, even black, brown, and grey.

I know that as people pick up their colours to place in the mold, some simply pick a piece on top, others look for a particular colour that represents their story at that time.

I remember a few years ago picking a purple piece because that was my Mother's favourite colour and she'd died 3 weeks earlier. And then I sat down in tears.

All of this has come back to me as I've lit our candle to honour the Christ-light that has shone in and through the lives we've celebrated and remembered.

And all of these stories are held within the life and the embrace of GOD's spirit. That's what we affirm when we pour the white wax that holds the colours together, and forms them into something new, beautiful and meaningful

(As I wrote this Witness on Thursday, a family were blessing and placing the Ashes of their loved mother and grandmother in our Memorial Garden, and I wondered: what colour was their story that day?)

Colour is such a powerful presence in our world, and beyond.

I know the liturgical colour for pentecost is red, but why should such a powerful story as Pentecost be limited to just one colour??

One of the truths of the first 'Christian' Pentecost, as I see it, is that it drew in a whole new crowd of witnesses, keen to understand its strangeness – new stories, new colours, new understandings, joined with those of the disciples, friends and followers of Jesus' way.

How better to express this than with a whole new colour palette?

Many years ago now, I was preparing to enter theological college and, as is often the case, I received advice from people in congregations: *"Don't let them change your faith with all that theology! If you don't hang on to what's black and white, all you'll be left with is shades of grey"*

Advice given in care and with the best intentions, but thirty-five years later, I can only say *"Thank GOD I ignored it!"*

I'm not always the bravest person, but I'm deeply grateful that I had the courage to open my eyes, my heart, and my mind, to a faith journey that included grey, but so many other colours too! Not just in college, but across all the years since.

To embrace the miraculous diversity of parable, of community, of tradition, of new beginnings (and some deaths), to see sacredness in totally unexpected places and people, to explore mystery, to listen to stories and create them together, discovering holiness in their midst... what a kaleidoscope of colour! (And now you know why I love kaleidoscopes!)

And can I suggest to you - who are part of the rich colour spectrum of my life - that a good way of celebrating Pentecost today might be sit for a while with the colours of your life and faith, and give thanks to the GOD in whom they shine?

Because, it turns out, Pentecost isn't just about what happened way back then, to those followers of Jesus' way!

Blessings, *Rod Peppiatt*