

Relief/Lay Preaching

Date	Sunday, 15 May 2016, 10 am Pentecost
Church	UCSA Glengowrie
Minister	Christine Ostle
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Church	

Text	Acts 2:1-21 Ps 104:24-34, 35b Rom 8:14-17 John 14:8-17(-21*), (25-27)
Theme	The Spirit of Truth
Liturgist	
Notices	With liturgical sources from
Others	
Sources	www.bruceprewer.com/DocC/C60sun31.htm

Old Testament Reading

The Glories of Creation (Psalm 104:24-34 ISV)

- (24) How numerous are your works, LORD!
 You have made them all wisely; the earth is filled with your creations.
- (25) There is the deep and wide sea,
 teeming with numberless creatures, living things small and great.
- (26) There, the ships pass through;
 Leviathan, which you created, frolics in it.
- (27) All of them look to you
 to provide them their food at the proper time.
- (28) They receive what you give them;
 when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
- (29) When you withdraw your favour,
 they are disappointed; Take away their breath, and they die and return to dust.
- (30) When you send your spirit, they are created, and you replenish the surface of the earth.
- (31) May the glory of the LORD last forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works!
- (32) He looks at the earth and it shakes; he touches the mountains and they smoke.
- (33) I will sing to the LORD with my whole being; I will sing to my God continuously!
- (34) May my thoughts be pleasing to him; indeed, I will rejoice in the LORD!

Welcome [Elder]

INTROIT – [Choir]

Call to Worship (based on Psalm 104)

Let us gather as the People of God with words from Psalm 104 praising the glories of creation – as written down for us by Rev. Bruce Prewer and reflecting our life here in Australia¹:

Spirit Friend, you come like the wind
and the earth grows hale at your breath.
You brood over the face of the waters
shaping things as they were meant to be.
You arrive like the wind filling the sails on the Southern Ocean,
and empower our slack churches
with a bold impetus towards new landmarks.
Some days you spin like a whirlwind,
startling, shaking, tearing – uprooting us from apathy,
and leaving us giddy with new possibilities in discipleship.
You visit us in the evening of life
when all our work is done, like a soft breeze at dusk
soothing tired faces, comforting our grieving
and giving peace at the last.

We sing together

Hymn: TIS 655 Spirit song (O let the Son of God enfold you)

Prayer

Let us pray together:

Wonderful are you, Creating Spirit,
who from the very beginning have brooded over the world with loving intent.
Wonderful are you, endowing Spirit,
who filled the Man of Nazareth with the courage of the purest, costliest saving love.
Wonderful are you, inflowing Spirit,
who fills the church with gifts for compassionate service within the world.

We your children worship and adore your glory – world without end.

Through Christ Jesus our Saviour.

Amen!

CONFESION

And we continue with our prayers and consider our life:

¹ © B.D. Prewer 2000 <<http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocC/C36pent.htm>>,
Adapted from "Australian Psalms" B D Prewer Open Book Publishers

Spirit Friend,
with the confidence Christ Jesus has given us, we come to you,
confessing our failings and receiving your strength.

Come as the **gift of truth**
to expose all pretence and self-deceit.

Come as the **rushing wind**
and scour our being of all that is stale, dusty and sour.

Come as the **tongues of fire**
and purge us of everything that is corrupt, base and infected.

Come as the **Counsellor**
to encourage integrity and faithfulness.

Come as the **seal of adoption**
that we may rejoice as children of God.

Come as the ,
bringing forgiveness and new beginnings.

And we consider in silent prayer
what each of us wants to bring forward to our Lord
_____ *[Silent prayer].*

O grace of Christ, **redeem** us.

O love of God, **enfold** us.

O power of the Spirit, **invigorate** us.

Amen!

Absolution

My Friends,
The Spirit we have received
is not a spirit of fear pushing us back into a life of drudgery,
but a Spirit of love.

Amen!

Where the Spirit is, there is liberty.

Be happy!

We are a forgiven family
to whom the gifts of heaven have been promised
and on whom the first instalment has been poured.

Thanks be to God!

Let us praise the Lord with

DOXOLOGY: TIS 768

Bible Readings [...]

The main theme of our readings today is “The Spirit of Truth”

Gospel: The Other Helper (John 13, 36 and chapter 14)

Epistle: Children of God (Romans 8:14-21 ISV)

Children’s Time –

Three questions around Language:

- Liz in the garden speaks to plants and worms – *do they understand her?*
- Martin Buber: Hugging a tree – you can sense him communicating with you. *True?*
- Max and Cerebral Palsy: *Whose problem is not understanding him – ours or his?*

Anthem: (planned by Choir)**Prayer before Sermon**

Lord, take *my* words and speak through them,
 take *our* thoughts and think through them,
 take *our* hearts and set them on fire with love for you
 through the power of the Holy Spirit,
 and in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Sermon – John 13, 36 and chapter 14, 1-19: “The Spirit of Truth”

I.

Pentecost. 50 days after Easter.

All of us know this story inside out. Ever since I was a child and began to understand the story, I was fascinated by it: All those who had been following Jesus were congregated when, in the German translation of the story by Martin Luther in 1545,

2 Vnd es geschach schnelle ein Brausen vom Himmel /
 als eines gewaltigen Windes /
 vnd erfüllt das gantze Haus / da sie sassen.

3 Vnd man sahe an jnen die Zungen zerteilet / als weren sie fewrig /
 vnd er satzte sich auff einen jglichen vnter jnen /
 4 vnd wurden alle vol des heiligen Geists /
 vnd fiengen an zu predigen mit andern Zungen /
 nach dem der Geist jnen gab aus zusprechen.

Or in English, in the King James version from 1611:

(2) And suddenly there came a sound from heaven
 as of a rushing mighty wind,
 and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

(3) And there appeared vnto them clouen tongues,
 like as of fire, and it sate vpon each of them.

(4) And they were all filled with the holy Ghost,
 and began to speake with other tongues, as the spirit gaue them vtterance.

In my imagination as a child, I could see myself sitting amongst these elderly men – at least that's how they seemed to me – and saw real tongues of real fire on their heads. Wouldn't the fire have eaten their hair, is what I was wondering? And why did it make them speak in languages, so that all people outside understood them? Are there really that many languages???

In later years, I met people and attended congregations who called themselves “Pentecostals”. I saw them praying and singing in “tongues” as a gift the Holy Spirit gave them, so they claimed. I would not deny it – who would I be to question the power of the Holy Spirit?

But for me – a male, German Protestant theologian, influenced by a historically critical reading of the Bible, and rational as I am – this was strange. Speaking in tongues, so that all those around understood them???? I would love to have this gift. But I don’t. So, what’s wrong with me?

Many of you might remember that in the past few years I have been working with Aboriginal and whitefella people who are trying to reclaim and revive their local indigenous languages. And as a church worker both in my international assignments in Germany and now here in Australia, language and understanding has always been an important issue of my life and work.

For instance, a long time ago, in 1992, I visited South Korea and attended a conference. I was the only European amongst a group of young activists discussing how to respond as Christians to the dictatorship situation in their country. My interpreter was a young Korean woman who was reasonably fluent in German. However, she kept forgetting to translate for me because she was closely involved in the discussions. At first I was quite frustrated, but then I had this amazing experience of being able to understand bits and pieces of their debate. No, they did not have tongues of fire on their heads, nor do I think I had been touched mysteriously by the Holy Spirit. My understanding of the Korean language (or Hangul, as it is called) was very limited, but I discovered that my friends were using international terms or names which I knew, and they often used their hands, feet and faces to describe what they were saying.

All of a sudden I was part of the discourse, even though I could only speak a few words.

It was like the Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel in reverse: Yes, we spoke different languages, and no, neither of us was sufficiently fluent in the other’s language – but we were able to understand one another.

Was the Holy Spirit involved? I will never know – but it was a miracle.

II.

Our sermon text, from the Gospel of John, chapter 14 takes us back again to the time a few days before Easter. It was the last meeting Jesus had with his immediate followers before the tragic events of his suffering and crucifixion, followed by his resurrection. It was the evening of the traditional Jewish Passover Festival – around the table for their last supper, which we as Christians celebrate as Holy Communion. It was a tense moment, full of doubt, confusion, fear, and despair amongst the disciples. Jesus had washed their feet, foretold the treachery of Judas Iscariot, and then – possibly over the meal – this discourse evolved over his farewell, as reported in the Gospel of John.

All the disciples sensed this was going to be the end of their journey together, and nobody really knew what was going to happen next.

Even Jesus told them:

“In a little while the world will no longer see me,
but you will see me.
Because I live, you will live also.” (v19).

I can really sense the confusion of these twelve men (and perhaps a number of women) who had followed Jesus through, as we say in German, “Dick und Dünn”, through thick and thin. The worst was to come, the traumata of their betrayals, the fear of detection, the crucifixion, the ultimate moment of the end. It was a moment of the *Kairos*, as theologians call it, the time of the ultimate truth.

Some of the modern Bible editions try to mirror this dialogue through their print setting: Jesus said ..., Simon Peter responded, Peter confronted, Thomas asked, Phillip challenged, Judas (not the

Iscariot) inquired ... and the responses by Jesus set in-between with an indent to the margin. If you have such a Bible, have a look – it is a fascinating read.

I imagine them sitting in the house of a friend in Jerusalem, on the floor around a low table, with some food and wine (or water), it may be dark outside so that they have candle light, and their mood is subdued. Surely, most of the enthusiasm of the early days of their crusade with their Rabbi *yis'w'* (Jeschua) from Nazareth would be gone. It's obvious: everything is about to end.

III.

And then there is this quiet exchange between Jesus and his friends. Like filling an empty bottle of wine, drop by trop, Jesus encourages his disciples *not* to give up.

You cannot follow me where I am going,
but I have given you a new commandment:
love one another, as I have loved you.

Don't be troubled,
in my father's house there is place for you all,
and *I shall return to take you there.*

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father; ...
what I say I do not speak of my own accord ...
because *I am in the Father and the Father is in me.*

I am the Way, I am the Truth and Life ...
If you know me, you know the Father.

Whoever believes in me,
will perform the same works as I do,
and even greater works.

And almost like a beacon shining into the darkness,

I will ask the Father
and he will give another *Paraclete*
to be with you forever,
the Spirit of truth,
whom the world can never accept since it neither sees or knows him
but you know him,
because he is with you,
HE IS IN YOU.

Closing this discourse of farewell, the promise:

I shall not leave you alone like orphans,
I shall come back to you.
And while the world will no longer see me,
YOU will see that I live, so shall you live.

Like a rainbow spanning its colourful arch over the troubled world, so Jesus: I am the way to the father; who believes in me will do greater works than I; the Spirit of Truth, the Paraclete given to you; and, you shall live!

The *Paraclete*. Many Bibles translate this word as the helper, advocate, encourager, or the Holy Spirit.

Martin Luther, the reformer of Christian theology and culture in Germany 499 years ago, translated it as comforter in times of sadness. For him and his times of political battles and uncertainties, peasant poverty, and times of dramatic changes, it had the strong connotation of encouraging those who were discouraged.

The way the author of the Gospel of John writes about the *Paraclete*, the word refers to a person, not a thing or just an unseen power, but rather as “someone called to be alongside” you or me to counsel, encourage, exhort.²

A few lines later (verse 26), Jesus explains to his disciples that the “Paraclete will teach you everything and remind you of everything I have told you”. Jewish scholars around the end of this first Century after Christ, when much their culture and language had been lost, tried to interpret this “Helper from God” in the context of the trials and sufferings of old Job:

“He who performs one good deed
has gotten to himself an *advocate* [paraclete],
and he who commits one transgression
has gotten to himself an *accuser!*”³

Still today, when we celebrate Eucharist, in some church traditions we invoke the spirit of the Paraclete. Following the teaching by the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth, in some churches we may recall the story of that meal on that very night:

(23) ... the Lord Jesus, in the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:

(24) And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said,
Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you:
this do in remembrance of me.

(25) After the same way he took the cup, when he had eaten,
saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood:
this do, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me. (1 Corinthians 11:23-25 KJV)

It is the Spirit of the Lord, who is amongst us, in us and with us. And he is reminding us of the life and work of Jesus, the Son of God. The Paraclete is pleading for us to God, but he is also teaching and reprimanding us! He is the Word of God that lives in us.

No, we can’t see God, and No, Jesus has not yet returned. But the miracle is that, like the rainbow arching over despair and hope, beyond our own human powers, there is more. There is so much more that Jesus can tell his disciples that they – or perhaps even we today – can fulfil things greater than what Jesus did in his life time.

Despite all the sufferings that the early Christians had to endure, and the sufferings that we later Christians have brought to bear over many peoples around the world, and not least here in Australia amongst the Aborigines — despite all this, the Spirit of the teaching of what Jesus Christ did in his life time still lives on, right here – right amongst us.

IV

Pentecost. 50 days later.

Did the Apostles really *remember*? I don’t know, and sometimes I wonder.

But *they* were not forgotten, not at all.

50 days later, while having congregated, the Paraclete, God’s own Spirit, took control of them. Beyond all their expectations, suddenly there was fire in their hearts, enthusiasm, courage, vision.

Perhaps my childhood fantasy of the flames on their heads was just an imagery of later generations. Perhaps it was only the sun shining brightly into the windows, creating a light effect.

Speaking in tongues so that everyone understood? Perhaps, maybe! I never understand my friend praying in tongues. Perhaps it’s me. But perhaps it is not at all important. Perhaps it is the fact that we can pray, and sing, and perhaps dance, together, with each other, for each other, and for the world – each of us in our own language. The words don’t matter – it is the heart that has been

² Lectionarystudies.com <<http://www.lectionarystudies.com/studyg/studyn/easter5agn.html>>

³ Kaufmann Kohler: PARACLETE, in The unedited full-text of the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia <<http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11899-paraclete>>

set on fire! It is that we have been caught by the story of Jesus, remembering his life and work and suffering, speaking out against suffering, for justice and in reconciliation. And we may try to be like Jesus, out there, and perhaps even more ...

Pentecost is one of the most important days of the Christian Church year for good reason. It was the moment when the disciples of Jesus, the Apostles, his friends, men and women, went out into the world. They accepted their calling by the Paraclete: To lay the fingers into the wounds of the world, to speak the truth about sin, justice and judgement (16, 9f). Ever since then, today and surely tomorrow, and despite all failings, this has been our calling:

- *love one another, as I have loved you*
- *Jesus is the Way, the Truth and Life*
- *Whoever believes in me, will perform ... even greater works.*

And beyond all,

YOU will see that I live, so shall you live!

Amen.

Hymn: TIS 397 Come, Spirit blest, Creator, come

News of the Community (...)

Hymn with offering: TIS 412 God sends us his Spirit to befriend and help

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Generous holy mystery we call God,
on this day, of all days,
we bring our gifts and our living.

Laugh with us, and weep with us, O God,
as we dare to believe that what we offer
can be part of your dreams for the world.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Let us continue with our prayers for the people around us:

Prayer of the People

Thanks and praise erupt from our lips, O Lord,
for you pour your Spirit upon us,
arousing us with visions and dreams
and intoxicating us with an uncontrollable fervour
to proclaim your truth in the language of praise.

You sent forth your Spirit to create the universe,
and fill it with your wonders.

You breathed into us and we rose from the dust,
the face of the earth came alive.

In these last days your child, Jesus Christ,
came speaking your words and doing your works;
revealing the truth of who you are.

He was crucified,
but you raised him to glory by your life-giving power.
Having secured our adoption as your children
and commissioned us to continue his works,
he poured out your Holy Spirit on us,
setting our hearts on fire with a passion for peace,
and firing our tongues with everlasting songs of joy.

In the name of your son and our Lord, Jesus Christ we pray for all
who are afraid and feel subdued today,
who are suffering pain, war, loss of a loved one,
who experience the miracles of your Spirit lifting them into life,
and for those who have never given up hope
and for whom the rainbow signals your never ending love for us
your creation and image of the fullness of life.

Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,
we offer you thanks and praise at all times
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

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And we continue our prayer with the Words that Jesus Christ has taught us:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

Let us finish our worship service with

Hymn: TIS 420 Holy Spirit, go before us

Benediction & Blessing

Go now in the power of the Holy Spirit.
Love Christ and do the things he has done.
Dream dreams, pursue visions
and speak of God's wonders
in the words of those who would hear.

And may God give you the Spirit of Truth forever;
May Christ Jesus work for you as you work for him;
and may the Holy Spirit bear witness within you
to the love and peace that are yours in Christ.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
In the name of Christ. Amen.

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I would like to close this service with a blessing
that has accompanied me time and again in the recent past:

Hymn: TIS 779 May the feet of God walk with you

Let's sing it twice:

May the feet of God walk with you,
and his hand hold you tight.

May the eye of God rest on you,
and his ear hear your cry.

May the smile of God be for you,
and his breath give you life.

May the Child of God grow in you,
and his love bring you home.

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Sources

Bible Readings Sunday 15 May 2016

The main theme of our readings today is **The Spirit of Truth**

Gospel

The Other Helper (John 13, 36 and chapter 14, 1-19)

(36) **Simon Peter** asked him, "Lord, where are you going?"

Jesus answered him, "I am going where you cannot follow me now, though you will follow me later on."

...

(1) "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

(2) There are many rooms in my Father's house.

If there were not, would I have told you that I am going away to prepare a place for you?

(3) And if I am going away to prepare a place for you,

I will come back again and welcome you into my presence, so that you may be where I am.

(4) You know where I am going, and you know the way."

(5) **Thomas** asked him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

(6) Jesus told him, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.** (7) If you have known me, you will also know my Father. From now on you know him and have seen him."

(8) **Philip** told him, "Lord, show us the Father, and that will satisfy us."

(9) Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?" Jesus asked him.

"The person who has seen me has seen the Father. So how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?

(10) You believe, don't you, that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?

The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own.

It is the Father who dwells in me and who carries out his work.

(11) Believe me, I am in the Father and the Father is in me.

Otherwise, believe me because of what I've been doing.

(12) Truly, I tell all of you with certainty, the one who believes in me will also do what I am doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

(13) I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

(14) If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.

(15) If you love me, keep my commandments.

(16) **I will ask the Father to give you another Helper, to be with you always.**

(17) **He is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor recognizes him.**

But you recognize him, because he lives with you and will be in you.

(18) I am not going to forsake you like orphans. I will come back to you.

(19) In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live also."

>>>>>>>> Page 2 – Epistle Reading >>>>>>>

Epistle**Children of God (Romans 8:14-21 ISV)**

- (14) For all who are led by God's Spirit are God's children.
- (15) For you have not received a spirit of slavery that leads you into fear again. Instead, you have received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba! Father!"
- (16) The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.
- (17) Now if we are children, we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with the Messiah--if, in fact, we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.
- (18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.