



*“I am a feather  
on the breath of God.”*

*—Hildegard of Bingen,  
caught up in the Spirit*

## **PENTECOST and RECONCILIATION SUNDAY** **31 May 2020**

### **Acknowledgement of Country**

This land is God’s land and God’s Spirit dwells here. As we begin our worship, we acknowledge the Kurna people, traditional custodians of this land under God. We commit ourselves again to working for reconciliation that we might discover together our common destiny in God.

### **Gathering Prayer** — Rev. Aunty Lenore Parker from *A Prayer Book for Australia*

God of holy dreaming, Great Creator Spirit:

From the dawn of creation, you have given your children  
the good things of Mother Earth.

You spoke and the gum tree grew in vast deserts and dense forest  
and, in cities at the water’s edge, creation sings your praise.

Your presence endures as the rock at the heart of our Land.

When Jesus hung on the tree you heard the cries of your people  
and became one with your wounded ones:  
the convicts, the hunted, and the dispossessed.

The sunrise of your Son coloured the earth anew  
and bathed it in glorious hope.

In Jesus we have been reconciled to you,  
to each other and to your whole creation.

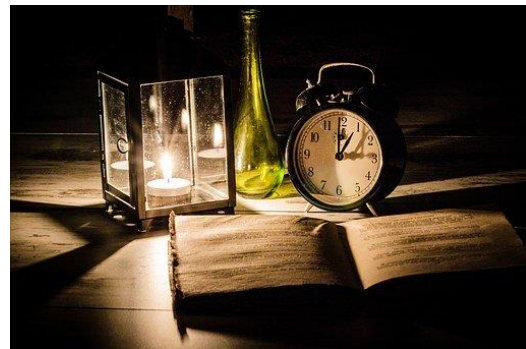
Lead us on, Great Spirit.

Enable us to walk together in trust from the hurt and shame of the past  
into the full day which has dawned in Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Scripture Reading — Acts 2:1–21

*Pentecost coincided with the Jewish Festival of Weeks—an agricultural and religious celebration that occurred fifty days after Passover during the late harvest of wheat. Jews would come to Jerusalem from across the diaspora to make their wheat offering in the temple. During this festival, Jews also recalled the giving of the Ten Commandments by God to Moses. Devout Jews would stay up all night studying the commandments and praying for the law to be revived in their hearts and in the land. The next day, the Book of Ruth would be read to the congregation.*

*This is the backdrop for the celebration of Pentecost, a day when we recall the gifting of Christ's Spirit. Before reading this passage, you might imagine the expectations of the disciples. You may recall before this scene in the Book of Acts, they enquired of Jesus whether this was the time when he would restore the kingdom of Israel. Now they are up all night, studying Torah and praying in hope for spiritual renewal. What a surprise the dawn will bring!*



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 nation 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?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel

'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

## Going Deeper



- When you consider the expectations and hope of the Festival of Weeks and the events of Pentecost Day as they unfolded, how would you answer the question, “What does this mean”?
- What values and ways of being does the Spirit inspire in you that might be perplexing to others at times? What enables you to continue in faithful observance?
- With what dreams or visions do you sense the Spirit gifting you recently for yourself? for your relationships? for the world around you?

### Reflections in Solitude and Silent Meditation

*You might choose to read the reflections in solitude here followed by some moments in silent meditation.*

#### How to meditate—from the World Community for Christian Meditation

Sit with your back straight and your feet on the floor. Close your eyes lightly. Then interiorly, silently begin to recite a single word — a prayer word or mantra. We recommend the ancient Christian prayer-word “Maranatha.” Say it as four equal syllables: Ma – ra – na – tha.

Breathe normally and give your full attention to the word as you say it, silently, gently, faithfully and — above all — simply. Let go of all thoughts (even good thoughts), images, sensations and other words as they arise. Don’t fight your distractions: let them go by saying your word faithfully, gently and attentively, returning to it with intention when your attention wanders.

## Prayers of Intercession

Holy Breath within creation, stirring, enlivening, setting us free: We pray for the world, the land in which we live, and for those whose paths we cross. In the silence, kindle in us a burning desire for compassion, justice and peace. With open hands we hold before you our hopes and dreams as we pray: *Come, Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.*

For the healing of creation and the restoration of harmony and balance we pray:  
*Come, Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.*

For a deeper listening across differences and a greater unity among peoples, especially among the First and Second People of this land we pray:  
*Come, Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.*

For a willingness to look at and care about systems that perpetuate injustice and the pushing to the edges of many in our country and world we pray:  
*Come, Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.*

For those who are in our hearts and on our minds... we pray:  
*Come, Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.*

## Disciples' 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.

## Blessing — from the UCASA Reconciliation Sunday resources

Go out into the world in the power of the Spirit;  
in all things, at all times,  
remember that Christ is with you;  
make your life your worship  
to the praise and glory of God.

The love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ and the communion of the Spirit be with us all.

## Reflections in Solitude — Week 10

### Rev. Christine Gilbert for St. Andrews by the Sea Uniting Church

*The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony.*

—from the Revised Preamble to the UCA Constitution

Like this year's celebration of Easter Resurrection that fell in the midst of fear and our first days of isolation, we will now ironically observe Pentecost Day as the church scattered, ungathered in the usual way. There will be no myriad shades of red clothing in church buildings, no spirited songs and hymns sung in one voice, no affirmation of who we are in our togetherness.

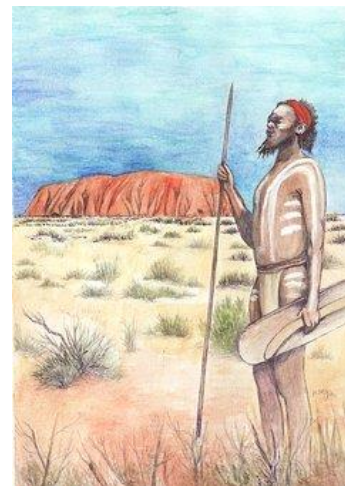
So, what might it be to open ourselves to the promptings of the Spirit in this season of waiting, when we cannot simply return to what was—nor may we want to—and what will be is still unfolding?

What is the meaning of Pentecost, the gifting of the Holy Spirit who emboldens and directs us for loving action, in this between and betwixt time?

How shall we celebrate this day when some are feeling dispirited and flattened by too much inactivity, screen time, and the stress of a constantly changing landscape?

At the same time that the Church celebrates Pentecost, we are also observing Reconciliation Week in our country. Among other things, this week raises our awareness of and gratitude for the insights and wisdom of the First Peoples as we seek a more common destiny together. In the ancient culture of the original custodians, I encounter a people who know how to wait with intent. I see it in the patient stillness needed for the hunt, the gentle, well-timed burnings that keep the land healthy and safe, the prayerful focus of the artists placing dots on a canvas, and in the slow but steady determination for recognition and justice.

Might these and other images point us towards what it means to be receptive to the Spirit of God, not just in this waiting time but at all times? For in these snapshots, I hear and see an invitation to be hospitable to dreams and visions from Creator God through an attentive, open-hearted silence, an active waiting for what will be to emerge rather than a pressing forth or insistence on our own way.



I have spoken before about my daylong Walk on Country experience last year during Reconciliation Week. The event had a two-fold purpose—to expose participants to a creation story of the Ngarrindjeri people within its place in the land and to raise support for one of its young leaders, Sean Weetra, to go on pilgrimage to the Taize community in France.

Beyond these stated purposes, what I noticed clearly was the alternative space and pace that Sean bore as host. As we made our way from Murray Bridge to Taillem Bend to Lake Alexandria and the Coorong, what he embodied, and therefore invited us into, was a wholistic, grounded experience. I got the sense that Sean wished for us to smell the air, gaze out quietly on the water, get the feel of each place which is part of the story itself. There was no rushing here. No pre-determined agenda or outcome.

In contrast, we as Second People seemed bamboozled by the spaciousness at times—What's happening now? What are we meant to be doing? We would periodically look at our watches or spend the waiting time checking our phones and taking photographs. It took us awhile to let go of the drive to make something in particular happen, and some of us never were able to enter the space and pace reflected by Sean.

For upon exiting our cars, we would locate Sean and take the fastest, shortest path to him in order to huddle around for our next instalment. This was, after all, the point, wasn't it?

Whenever Sean paused in his presentation, so-called questions were often immediately fired to prompt him to talk about the injustices and suffering of his people. I say so-called because it seemed to me the questioners already knew the answers. Sean's half-hearted responses suggested to me he may have had feelings about being distracted—or worse, contained—by the motivation behind their questions.

In reflecting on this experience now, it is my growing conviction that the Spirit is manifested to us within the space and pace demonstrated by Sean that day. To be open and receptive to the Spirit requires an attentiveness made possible by an inner freedom that is continually detaching from and letting go of any particular outcome or preference.

To be responsive to the force of Spirit, then, entails that we be grounded and sober, awake and alert to the stirrings within and without. It is quite a different way of being than our usual mode of detailed planning that hopes to mitigate risk, lag time and possible intrusion.

But might our careful and orchestrated ways of being sometimes leave too little room for the Spirit to breathe and move? Might we be too absorbed in and focused on what we're doing to notice the Spirit's initiatives and be able to respond with a certain amount of spontaneity and even risk?



In speaking of her experience of being moved by the Spirit, Hildegard of Bingen said, "I am a feather on the breath of God." A feather! Have you ever seen one floating in the

air? Hildegard speaks of a responsiveness that takes her well beyond anything set in stone or the inflexibility of habitual behaviours, customs and ways of relating.

It is reminiscent of the shattering of expectation that happened on the first Pentecost Day as told by Luke-Acts. For generations, during the Festival of Weeks, the devout immersed themselves in what they understood faithfulness to mean—obedience to the law of Moses and to Torah. They prayed all night for the law to be newly inscribed on their hearts and for the nation of Israel to be restored to its former glory.

What a surprise to hear the roar of Spirit come upon them like the rush of winter wind, to feel the flow of the Holy One within and around them inspiring them to take up Jesus' ministry of love *in the way of Jesus*—that is, showing up, being fully present, and responding to the Spirit's impulse in each situation, every day.

So, as we celebrate Pentecost Day with the fresh perspective these days are bringing, what might it be for you to be like a feather on the breath of God? Where is the Spirit blowing you and inviting you to be just now? Where are you finding occasions to love and serve? Of what might you need to let go in order to be free to move with the Spirit? What does it look like for you to wait with intent on the Spirit within the various situations of your life at this time?

*Holy Wisdom, Soaring Power,  
encompass us  
with wings unfurled,  
and carry us,  
encircling all,  
above, below,  
and through the world.*

*—Hildegard of Bingen*