**St Andrew’s on The Terrace Pentecost Sunday 4 June 2017**

**Readings for Pentecost Sunday 1 June 2017** **Hebrew Bible Numbers 11:24-29**

24So Moses went out and told the people what the Lord had said. …. 25Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again. 26However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. 27A young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” 28Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses’ aide since youth, spoke up and said, “Moses, my lord, stop them!” 29But Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”

**Contemporary reading from Ch 5 ‘Spiritual renewal from below’** in *The Darkening Spirit* by David Tacey, p 76.

But those who strive to recover spirit today have noticed something new and fascinating. As we attempt to bring spirit into awareness, many have observed that it has changed its character. Jung said spirit has ‘darkened because it needs to be reborn.’ In its new form, it serves as an impulse toward wholeness or as a genius of integration. This heralds a new development in civilisation and a change in our understanding of religious life. When the sacred returns it is not the same as before. Much has changed in our experience of the sacred and in our perception of its character. Peter Murphy makes an illuminating point: ‘The [new] scared takes the sanctimonious out of religious life. It resists and expels, and often satirises, the moralising and morbid dimensions of traditional religion.’

The newly emerging spirituality emphasises a wholeness of body, psyche and spirit. In the previous age, spirit appeared to seek an upward movement toward the subline, the holy. It wanted to shrug off nature, instinct, body and sexuality, and being ‘spiritual’ meant striving for perfection. The ‘spiritual’ person was pious to the point of being rigidly moralistic by today’s standards. In our world, spirit appears to be headed in a different direction. It has acquired a new familiarity with darkness and will not be able to shake it off. Spirit will no longer allow itself to be experienced as light without darkness, perfection without blemish, mind without flesh, heaven without genitalia. We are urged to seek a new way of connecting with the divine, a way to the unification of body, psyche and spirit.

As the spirit is released from its conscious state, it does not move heavenward, but stays with and on the earth, serving to bind together the things that were formerly torn apart. It does not reassert the old dualism but strives for a unity of purpose.

I remember when I was twelve, I was entrusted with answering the school telephone if it rang during interval when staff were at their weekly staff meeting and morning tea. I was very proud of this honour, so imagine my chagrin and anger when I barrelled around the corner ready to answer said phone only to find another classmate had beaten me to it! What more an unauthorised classmate! What followed was not edifying/ It’s better that what happened in the school foyer stays in the school foyer. (I dramatise, it wasn’t that bad)

I was brought up to obey and respect the authorised leaders of whatever institution I was in – church, school, work, jazzercise, folk dancing, choirs, ski instructor etc., etc., etc. In the passage from Numbers, Moses brings down what seems to be the ‘authorised’ Spirit. There results a one-off ecstatic utterance and profound spiritual experience among those 70 ‘authorised’ elders.

But, surprise surprise, Eldad and Medad ( great names, aren’t they?) – Eldad and Medad, while they could have been with the 70.. [70 by the way because it is based on 7, the biblical number of spiritual perfection is merely a number commenting that the gathering of elders who an extremely spiritually perfect grouping – not indicating the elders were perfect but the spiritual experience was.]

So Medad and Eldad were not there in the inner circle experiencing directly the spiritually perfect moment, but hey presto, though separated from this group experience, they nevertheless prophesied, the Spirit bringing them separately a spiritual experience among the people in the camp at large. This was unusual enough for a young man to run and report this to the elders. Joshua, later to be a great leader of Israel but then interning under Moses, expostulates, demanding Moses should stop this unauthorised activity! That pesky Spirit! Not staying within the boundaries of the Elders’ Council, but popping up all over the place announced and unauthorised! Whatever will God do next! Tsk! Tsk!

[An aside – the term used here for the spiritual experience is prophesying. Let’s not for the moment worry what that actually meant – was it foretelling the future, praising God, speaking in tongues? I do not think that detail matters here. The point is an experience which bubbles up and over and out of a person, which has life and enthusiasm and energy about it; spiritual power and presence. And the question of whether that spiritual experience is of God and therefore ‘authorised’]

Moses takes a wider view – he does not want to hold tightly and possessively to the Spirit as his or the elders’ personal property. What did he say*? “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put God‘s Spirit on them!”*

I was working with the annual statistics for the church this week. It is interesting analysing the roll! We cannot just proudly report a number, but are asked to divide that number into ‘under 25’s’, those between 25 and 45 years of age, those between 46 and 65, and those ‘over 65’. Each year we have to make some educated guesses!

Because the request is for numbers of associate members and members, the numbers are already skewed a little as it is older generations who tend to be more prepared to actually join organisations these days! – maybe if we offered the chance to subscribe online the take-up would be greater among the under 45s! Gen X, who now range from about 30-50 years of age would fit into this group of under 45s, also Gen Y who range from about 15 to 30 years of age at the moment. We have good numbers in the over 45s but much fewer in the under 45s.

So, Gen X and Y tend to be missing from organised religion or at least organised churches like ours. That’s not surprising as the theological journey which this church follows tends to be one people join about mid life. Sometimes they have sidelined the spiritual journey for a while but beginning from around 40-45, or latter in life, something draws them back to spiritual exploration or at much that age they are drawn to intentional spiritual journeying for the first time.

What if anyone, whether they are Gen X or Y or the next generation up, baby boomers, or the quiet loyal generations, does not mingle with the organised church congregation? That is, what if they are like Eldad and Medad out in the camp, not in the circle where spiritually perfect experiences are expected? Is their spiritual activity suspect; not authorised by the supreme authority of life and faith?

Somewhere recently I was in a conversation about young people not being interested in church, or losing their interest at a certain stage. Competing interests such as sport and music and school pressures were mentioned, compared with the relative quiet of Sundays when the baby boomers and above were children. I remember my Dad in the 60s when he was on the town council, solemnly, with his fellow councillors, deciding whether or not the Council would allow the local cinema to open on a Sunday night. He conducted his own research by driving along the main Street of God after evening church to see if it were true that young people were hanging about here with nothing constructive to occupy them. (They were, I was in the car). Daringly, he risked his reputation as a good Christian by voting in favour of the cinema opening.

In my recent conversation I mentioned the themes of the great block buster movies. These films stood out as they came into the cinema and more significantly they have passed into folklore, particularly into Gen X’s lives as a framework for understanding the world. Star Wars (1997-1983) and (2015-) Star Trek, (1964-2002), the Lord of the Rings trilogy (2001-3), the Hobbit, (2012-2014) Harry Potter (2001-2011) to name a few stand outs in recent times.

Through these epic movies runs a thread of what the Christian Scriptures are all about – the constant epic battle between good and evil forces. All the movies about Superheros such as Superman, Spiderman, Batman, Wonder woman, Iron man are about the saviour figure coming to the rescue when all seems lost. A buff man with a cape and a huge S emblazoned on his chest flying through the magic of movies will inevitably upstage a quiet carpenter in middle Eastern robes any time. In some ways, however, the message is the same. Even James Bond movies, though encased in a heavily sequined wrapping of sex and violence have the same good/evil battle at their back.

There are deviations from the Christian script – some of them important – for Jesus was deliberately ***not*** a larger-than-life, sexy hunk of a gladiator type leader. Would we though, want this cinematic script-making to stop because it was happening outside the expected arena for spiritual journeying? We might not want it to stop because then we would have no movies to go to. But also, do we take this twenty-first century myth-making seriously as a spiritual resource for generations X, Y and Z? And, if movies *are* the new Scriptures for gen X and Y who is interpreting these great movie themes for and with them? As grandparents, what movie-illustrated conversations can you have with your grandchildren and great grandchildren or nieces and nephews about how they see good and evil, what makes a person a hero or an anti-hero and whose side they are on and why?

When we go to the movies, whatever our generation, do we always use them as a break from our mundane world with little thought, or do we reflect on them later, discuss them with friends? Do we work out how these themes are so similar to those Jesus spoke of, which he illustrated not with celluloid or by DVD but with metaphors and parables. Would Moses say if he were here today “I wish that *all* moviemakers were prophets and that God would anoint them all with the Spirit”?

These movies sometimes seem dark and foreboding to baby boomers and quiet loyal generations. We like our movies lighter, perhaps. It may be that they reflect the darkening of the Spirit which David Tacey prophesies. What was it we heard Jennifer read?

*In our world, spirit appears to be headed in a different direction. It has acquired a new familiarity with darkness and will not be able to shake it off. Spirit will no longer allow itself to be experienced as light without darkness, perfection without blemish, mind without flesh, heaven without genitalia. We are urged to seek a new way of connecting with the divine, a way to the unification of body, psyche and spirit.*

*As the spirit is released from its conscious state, it does not move heavenward, but stays with and on the earth, serving to bind together the things that were formerly torn apart. It does not reassert the old dualism but strives for a unity of purpose.*

The movies I watch which try to combine a this-world plot with an other-worldly dimension sometimes fall a little flat, as the clichés they employ of heaven and angels don’t seem to fit well with earthly circumstances. Tacey’s words would suggest that we do not have to worry about introducing other-worldly ‘heavenly’ dimensions – there is enough material around us here on earth to play out the important themes of good and evil, love and hate, character and deviance, compassion and confession.

And since it means, for the good of our spiritual journey, attending *more* movies, we can rejoice that the Spirit has taken up residence here on earth! It is right here and right now that she is working with us in binding ‘together the things that were formerly torn apart’; bringing ‘unity of purpose’.

And we can rejoice that for us, it is not a case of “*May* the Force be with you” but “The Force *will* be with you. Always.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

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1. http://starwars.wikia.com/wiki/May\_the\_Force\_be\_with\_you [↑](#footnote-ref-1)