

St Andrew's on the Terrace 9 June 2019 Pentecost QMC Centenary Celebration

Readings for the Gathering

Hebrew Bible

The Beginning

Genesis 1:1-9

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. ⁶ And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." ⁷ So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸ God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day. ⁹ And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so.

Epistle

The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21

² When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. ⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ...we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Peter Addresses the Crowd

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of God. ²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of God will be saved.'

Gospel

John 14:8-17

⁸ Philip said, "Jesus, show us God and that will be enough for us." ⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen God. How can you say, 'Show us God'? ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in God, and that God is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is God, living in me, who is doing this work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in God and God is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to God. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that God may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit

¹⁵ "If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask, and God will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept the Spirit, because it neither sees nor knows the Spirit. But you know, for the Spirit lives with you and will be in you.

Contemporary Reading

"Queen Margaret of Scotland"

Born over a thousand years ago, Margaret and her family fled to Scotland, when their own land was invaded. There they became refugees, protected by King Malcolm the third. Malcolm fell in love with Margaret and asked her to marry him. At first, Margaret refused because she wanted to be a nun. Then

she realised she could serve God, still marry Malcolm and serve her country as well. They married and parented six sons and two daughters. Margaret was a strong woman, leading the country with her husband. She was known as a fair queen. She set up schools. She built hospitals. She helped people who wanted to go on pilgrimages by starting a ferry service across the sea to St Andrews in Fife. Her favourite possession was a book of stories from the Gospels, which some say was given to her by her husband. This very book has survived and can be seen today in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Under Margaret, Scotland was no longer an uncivilized backwater, but a modern, European, religiously orthodox country ruled by a powerful royal couple.

Reflection for the Gathering

Someone one once wrote an article entitled “God is more than two men and a bird.” Well, God is even more surprising than that. It’s not a very well known fact that the Holy Spirit is a girl. In the reading which Mrs Young read earlier, the Spirit which brooded over the chaotic waters in that story of the beginning of time, was called *ruach* – a feminine Hebrew word meaning wind or breath. In the Greek written part of the Bible, the Holy Spirit is called *pneuma* – also meaning breath. There the word has a neutral gender. So, on balance, grammatically speaking, the Holy Spirit is a ‘she’. We will sing about her after this reflection.

Sometimes, the idea of the Spirit brooding over the waters is pictured as a bird flying over – like this animation.... And also, we hear of the spirit descending like a dove when Jesus was baptised in the Jordan at about 30 years old.

Acceptance that the Spirit might be female was evident as early as the 12th century in this fresco where a female person is flanked by Jesus and God – rather looks like they are holding her down so she won’t fly away! In the contemporary movie *The Shack*, the Holy Spirit is called *Sarayu* and is pictured as an Asian woman, usually found gardening in people’s souls. Here is the whole crew – from the left, Jesus, Mack the main character of the story, God (or *Papa*) and *Sarayu*, the Spirit.

Women in the Bible are not always well known either. They appear in small fragments of stories, though, more often than you think. During May here at St Andrew’s on The Terrace we looked at Eve, Miriam and Deborah (the reflections are on the website if you are interested); a seeker, a singer and a judge. Mary Magdalene might be the most famous woman in the Bible after Jesus’ mother Mary. She is mentioned 11 times in the second part of the Bible, more than the other disciples are, suggesting she was a really important person in the early church when the Gospels were written. A survivor of mental illness, her reputation has been tainted by a pope in the 9th century declaring her to be a prostitute on no scriptural evidence at all. She was a close disciple of Jesus and later was known as the messenger or Apostle to the Apostles since she was commissioned by Jesus to carry the good news to them on Easter Sunday morning.

In Queen Margaret College’s motto, you have the word Truth. It’s more than a perfume made by Calvin Klein. You have to be brave to stand for the truth – like Deborah was when she was a judge and military leader in ancient Israel. We have our own female judges in New Zealand, perhaps the most famous are Dame Sylvia Cartwright and former Chief Justice Sian Elias. In the church we have leaders who stand for truth, here are Marg Schrader and Millie te Kaawa, both of them have been women Moderators or leaders in the Presbyterian church – Millie in *Te Aka Puaho*, the Maori Synod and Marg Moderator of the whole church in 1995. On the right you can see Marg speaking just last year at the General Assembly of the Church. Going further back, into another country’s history, Truth Sojourner was a slave woman in the US. She became the first woman to sue a white man for his continued and illegal enslavement of her son. She succeeded with her case.

Another word in your motto is Light. Greta Sundberg has been spreading light along with truth as she has fought for recognition of climate change. As her own personal action towards saving the climate she

has vowed never to fly. She was invited to speak at an international finance meeting in Davos in Switzerland. To get there from Sweden where she lived, she travelled 32 hours by train.

Malala was already campaigning aged 15 for light to come to girls through education when she was the subject of an acid attack in Pakistan. Our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern has become internationally renowned for her sombre but light touch as she showed compassion after the Christchurch attacks.

Presbyterian ministers also spread the light of love as they minister in the church. This serious looking young woman was the first female Presbyterian minister to be ordained. Margaret Reid was ordained here in this church just over 50 years ago, looking that young! My friend Rose Luxford ministers in Timaru and another friend Alofa Lale was a minister in Dunedin.

Fire: Today we celebrate Pentecost. It is associated with fire and red because of the tongues of fire which Lucy read about earlier – the fire of the Spirit, the fire of Love. Captain Marvel is a superhero associated with fiery lightning when using her superpowers. More female superheroes are evident these days. In one of the latest superhero movies, one played by Scarlett Johansson, the Black Widow, acts as a Redeemer figure. She gives her life deliberately so the quest for good to triumph can continue – just like Jesus did.

Another movie you might remember, Frozen, shows a good person overcoming evil – in this case the fire of love thawing a frozen heart.

We have plenty of feisty, fiery women in New Zealand who have fought hard for issues they are concerned about, taking risks along the way which have not always endeared them to different groups; Sue Bradford working for the unemployed, Kate Sheppard campaigning for women's suffrage, Sonia Davies working in trade unions, Dame Catherine Healey supporting sex workers, Marilyn Waring who crossed the floor to vote with her conscience in Parliament, Celia Lashlie who fought for a better life for many and my predecessor here, Margaret Mayman who's still campaigning – now in Australia at the moment for Manus and Nauru Island detainees amongst other issues. All of them superheroes of their time.

Truth and Light and Fire are all good qualities. They work even better in the world when they are tempered with love – the love of the Spirit whom we celebrate today. We are not all going to be the Chief Justice and we haven't all been members of parliament. We may not be ministers either of religion or government, we may be ordinary people from young to older to older and to very old. This woman, now aged 101, was dragged out of the rubble of her house after the Kaikoura earthquake just a few years ago.

So let me conclude by telling you about Shelagh who was an ordinary woman. Shelagh is Canadian. She died suddenly of an aneurysm in Toronto in 2012. Her death notice in the Toronto Star attracted the attention of a reporter at the newspaper. This resulted in Catherine Porter's article, headlined: "Shelagh was here, an ordinary magical life". The death notice which attracted Catherine's attention had read: "Our world is a smaller place today without our Shelagh... Our rock, our good deed doer, our tradition keeper, our moral compass."

The death notices intrigued the reporter so much she went to Shelagh's funeral and found out what had made her such an interesting and important ordinary person to those who knew her. The reference to the article is in the printed script of this reflection in case you'd like to read it.¹ Shelagh was 55, single, childless and profoundly deaf in one ear.

¹ https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/shelagh_gordon.html

The reporter found out from her funeral service that Shelagh made people around her feel not just loved but coveted. Catherine wrote: "That was the golden thread that stitched together the ordinary seams of her life... Shelagh had found her calling... loving people fiercely and with abandon."

You may become a Chief Justice, you may already be a superhero, but what people will remember about the way you touched their lives, is whether you did it with love and with grace, compassion and kindness. If you touch their hearts, you will have made a difference.

You may be an ordinary person – you may always have been ordinary, and you may always *be* ordinary but what people will remember about the way you touched their lives, is whether you were ordinary with love and with grace, compassion and kindness.

If you touch their hearts, like Shelagh did, you will have made a difference.

That was Jesus' message – we heard in the Gospel reading that he carried a message from God. He brought that message to life – he told the truth and brought the light, all with the warming fire of love. That was Jesus' quest, let us make it ours.

In the movie *The Shack* the God figure, Papa, keeps saying to Mack "I am especially fond of Melissa..." or "I am especially fond of Jane" and almost breaks Mack's bruised heart when she says: "I am especially fond of you." Watching the movie, you get the message. God is especially fond of everyone.

That's a message all women and girls need to hear, a message all boys and men need to hear. It's a message we need to spread to others. People need to hear truth and they need to see the light, but both need to come to them with the fire of love, with an especially fond, fiery love.

So may it be

Susan Jones 027 321 4870 04 909 9612 minister@standrews.org.nz