

# Reflection on the day of Pentecost during Reconciliation Week

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## Preparation:

Watch

the telling of the story of Pentecost by the Crossroads Kids' Club at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vuUK6REOWuE>

**(Acts 2: 1-21)**

Read

**Galatians 5: 13-26**

**1 Corinthians 12: 4-13**

Pray

Come, Spirit of God,  
renew the whole creation,  
for you are the enemy of apathy  
and heavenly dove.  
Amen.

The Bible reading that was presented by the Crossroads Kids' Club, retelling the story from Acts 2:1-21, is wonderful in two ways.

Firstly, the content: the disciples were gathered and there was the sound of rushing wind, and tongues of flame, like fire, rested on them – though, as we heard in the telling of the story, this was “way cooler” so the fire didn't burn them (see what they did there). And people from all over the world, every nation under heaven, were present for the Jewish feast day and heard the proclamation of the gospel and the praise of God in their own languages: the good news of God's reconciling love for us all, and a glimpse of the promise in Revelation of every nation sharing in God's praise.

The second wonderful thing about the telling of the story this morning - which would have been most obvious to those with screens but may have been picked up by those on phones, too - was that it came from America and was spoken by children of different skin colours, all together. There is hope! Even if the news from there this week has made us sad, or angry, or just plain appalled or despairing at how far there is to go.

And it's not just from one story. In a way, the most telling story was that of the woman in central park who had her dog off a leash in a place where it shouldn't have been. She was white. And when black man, a dedicated bird-watcher, had asked her to leash her dog in

that area, she was filmed phoning the police, feigning that she was being threatened by a black male, knowing that her white privilege would be protected and that this was a simple way to threaten him. It was a sad demonstration of that assumed privilege.

And then, awfully, there was the death of George Floyd, in what video footage shows to be a callous use of unnecessary force on a man already handcuffed and on the ground. Which sadly and unsurprisingly has led to an outpouring of frustration and rage and grief. Not helped by the fact that even voting registration in many states remains distinctly discriminatory.

Of course, we cannot look in judgement if we don't check out ourselves, check the "log in our own eye", so to speak. Thank God, we don't have the same violent confrontationism in Australian society. But health outcomes for Indigenous people remain consistently lower than for the rest of society, with people carrying histories of deep hurt, even though our Indigenous people have the longest cultural heritage in the world, deeply grounded in the land, in kinship and in the environment.

20 years ago this week we had the largest political demonstrations in Australian history – without violence – with 250,000 people crossing the Sydney Harbour Bridge and another 300,000 walking in Melbourne. Our small efforts to regularly acknowledge and show respect for the First Peoples of this land are a foundation at least for more positive engagement in which to hear their call for Voice, Treaty and Truth.

For Pentecost Sunday to fall in Australia's Reconciliation Week is a remarkable convergence. Our Bible readings are firmly based in the conviction that in Christ we are all members of the one body; that we are all baptised into the one body, where our background is as Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, women and men. We heard that implicitly in the reading from Acts, but it's even more explicit in Paul's letters to the Corinthians and the Galatians.

The reading to the Galatians started with words that made it sound so suitable for America, where there is such an overt focus on personal freedom. It began:

"For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

It sounds so very apt.

The reading goes on to speak about *not* being led by our base envies and pride - which you may recall was a theme in Paul's writing to the Corinthians, too - and *not* being led by selfish passions, but living by the Spirit.

Paul talks about the fruit of living by the Spirit, although he doesn't give a lot of pointers as to how to do it. I think it's fair to read into it that he means us to be intentional about

learning from Jesus, through the Scriptures; about seeking, prayerfully, to follow the Spirit's lead in building up the community and sharing the joy of God's kingdom; and deliberately listening for the Spirit's promptings as we interact with God and with our neighbours. As we regularly and practice those things, consistent with Jesus' life, then those fruit of the Spirit grow.

That's all good, but I find myself tripping over some of Paul's words here about crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires. It almost sounds as though we are to become completely submissive, devoid of passion, even in the face of injustice, just waiting patiently and gently and hopefully.

In reality, though, love and hope are active. Paul may not be driven by *selfish* cravings and passions, but he is passionate that the law of love should prevail, that Gentiles should be equal partners with Jews in the gospel, that God's grace is for us all, equally, through Christ, and we are all equally dependent on it. It's a case he argues with passion.

He is passionate for prophetic voices to be heard in the body of Christ; for the proclamation of the love of God; and for teaching, leadership, forms of assistance, and all kinds of spiritual gifts to be exercised for the sake of the body of Christ, so that *all voices* can join freely in God's praise.

We heard the reading from Acts the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, told by children's voices from across America's race divide. The words of reconciling love speak across all languages and into all cultures.

Pentecost, with the Holy Spirit given to all, is so much about reconciliation. We began with a prayer for the Holy Spirit to come and renew the whole creation; we continue in prayer for God's reconciling love to work through us, and in all the world.

*Prayer and song follow*