

## **REFLECTION 28<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2023**

**By Rev Dr Fei Taule'ale'ausumai**

### **What is your spiritual gift?**

Pentecost falls 50 days after Passover, as its Greek name, Pentecoste which means (50th) suggests. It is also called Whitsunday. Instead of preaching from the second chapter of Acts on the day of Pentecost I have chosen the other lectionary reading from 1 Corinthians 12 as our text for this morning. This is on the variety of gifts a variety of services, variety of activities, the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, to another the gift of healing another the working of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirit, various tongues and interpretation of tongues, all by the one and the same Spirit. When I ask what is your spiritual gift, is this something that SAOTT talk about? For me, over the year that I have come to know you all some of you have the gift of wisdom and the gift of knowledge. Would you consider these as gifts of the Spirit? They are not achievements but gifts, would you agree?

The dramatic story of Pentecost should not, create the impression that the gift of the Spirit to the church was one-time only event. Because the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is associated with the beginning of the church's life in Jerusalem. The Pauline reading for today helps correct any notion that the gift of the Spirit is such an unrepeatable act. What Paul says about the Spirit within this context pertains to the corporate life of the community of believers, as the "body" metaphor of this passage illustrates. Paul seldom refers to the Holy Spirit as a way of talking about God's action in relation to the private faith of individual believers.

As you are all aware I was in Queenstown last weekend for the National Assessment Workgroup. I was subbing in for a Pacific Assessor who was unavailable. It was a weekend of discernment where we listened to impromptu speeches, prepared speeches and different group exercises. The whole process is confidential, there were only 2 candidates being assessed for acceptance into the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa NZ and Knox Centre for Ministry Leadership. Both candidates were affirmed by the end of our assessment. This is now public knowledge.

It was very interesting that St Andrew's on the Terrace has a reputation amongst the evangelicals that precedes us. I received questions like "what are you doing there? etc by the evangelicals who were part of the assessment team. Anyway, I spent the whole weekend discussing/defending progressive theology among other things. I was also asked whether I was involved in the healing ministry. It did feel like a trick question to test my faith and theology. I answered this question by talking about a personal ministry and gift that I feel that I have been given to share. Back in my time in Auckland, I when I was visiting with the family and friends who were dying I would ask them if they would like to be anointed. I carried a small bottle of oil with me in my bag. The response was always tears of joy, they felt honoured that they were receiving a special anointing with oil and the sign of the cross on their forehead. It gave them a real sense of peace. I operated on the Markan 6:13 text that says "after the disciples were first sent out by the Jesus to continue his healing ministry, "They anointed many sick people with oil and cured them" (Mark 6:13). I believe that my gift of anointing sick people was to help them overcome the fear death and give them peace in preparation for leaving this world. I have only practiced this with family and friends but am not restricted to my own. The person who asked the question initially was relieved to hear that I did practice the gifts of ministry.

In the context of the Corinthian church, Paul's reference to "spiritual gifts" is already a mild act of pastoral confrontation. At least some of the Corinthians appear to have excelled in wisdom and have been speaking in tongues, activities they understood to reflect their own spiritual superiority and authority. These gifts of the Spirit are not personal achievements they reflect the Giver and not the recipient.

I'm a member of the Doctrine Core Group of the PCANZ and we have been tasked with writing, reviewing the Churches Theology of ordination. The gift of the ministry of preaching the word and administering the sacraments of Holy Communion.

Part of our response to this church document is to say that: There can be no suggestion of special status or hierarchy for those ordained to this ministry. Rather their vocation is to be undertaken with the greatest humility and awe. They are called to proclaim the divine Word rather than a word of their own making. Just as Isaiah confessed during his commissioning as a prophet, 'Woe is me. I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips... (Isaiah 6:5), so those called to the ministry of Word and Sacrament must be ever mindful of their own unworthiness for the task and of their utter reliance on the power and the grace of God.

The Priesthood of All Believers. The commission to proclaim the gospel, to make disciples, to baptise, and to teach is a commission given to the whole church. Likewise, the gifts of the Spirit necessary for the fulfilment of this commission are variously distributed across all the members of the Body. Each has a part to play. Thus all the members of the Body of Christ are, in virtue of their baptism, equal in principle and jointly share in the priesthood proper to the

Body of Christ. This does not mean however that all will undertake the same roles. The distribution of gifts across the Body requires discernment as to the giftedness of particular individuals and their suitability for particular roles within the Body. Since all are priests under the headship of Christ, and since it is the Body as a whole that is called to participate in the mission of God no individual may take it upon him or herself to exercise the roles of minister, elder, or deacon without the consent, commissioning, and support of the whole body. These are corporate ministries of the whole Body which are to be exercised representatively by appropriately gifted, appointed, and commissioned members.

Taking seriously the plurality of gifts, each being indispensable for the building up of the Body, must mean that there is no place for clericalism. There is no place, that is, for the privileging of one form of ministry within the Church or for according to those who exercise it a greater status within the Body. It does not mean however that there is no place for the clerical office. To dispense with it would relativise the importance, not of the person holding the office who is to be understood as a servant along with other members of the Body, but of the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments through which the church is formed and by which its life is sustained.

My experience over last weekend and subsequent conversations can be summed up in what Bruce Epperley *Professor of Practical Theology and Director of Continuing Education at Lancaster Theological Seminary* has to say. *He says you can embrace evangelicals and Pentecostals and still be progressive; you can affirm God's truth in other faiths and be a spirit-centered progressive; you can challenge all forms of exclusionary behavior and theology and have a lively sense of God's Spirit; you can affirm a cosmos made up of billions of galaxies and a wondrous cosmic and evolutionary adventure and have a personal*

relationship with Jesus; and you can pray for things small and large – always expecting “miracles,” revelations of God’s presence and power – and partner with God in bringing forth justice, abundant life, and healing in all things.

The day of Pentecost became for the disciples a new beginning; it gave them a new hope. Jesus said as part of his departing speech to his disciples, in a little while I will be gone, but I will send you a helper, the comforter to be with you. The Parousia, the Holy Spirit. The disciples and many of the followers of Christ didn’t really understand at the time what he was talking about. Some of them believed that he would go and then return again shortly after, particularly when he said “in a little while”. There was not much action after Jesus left, people got complacent, even some of the law as laid down on the sermon of the mount didn’t need to be understood because Jesus wouldn’t be gone long he would be back in a little while. But when he didn’t return, when this second coming didn’t happen the disciples began to internalise Christ within. The coming of the Holy Spirit is the delayed Parousia, the coming of Christ as the helper and comforter as promised. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit and says I will be with you. Emmanuel God with us. I want to conclude with a prayer by Bill Loader of the Uniting Church of Australia.

## A Prayer to God, the Spirit

O God,  
You are Spirit;  
You are wind;  
You are breath.

You meet us in the wonders of creation,  
in the awe of wonderful things,  
in the terror of fearful things.

You blow among the fallen leaves,  
the broken branches,  
the whining pain  
and the whirlwinds of delight.

Your wind gently touches our brow  
with comfort and caress;  
your forgiveness raises us to life;  
your challenge disturbs our tidy piles  
and spreads opportunities before our eyes.

Gentle Spirit, breathe on us your life.  
Strong Spirit, open our closed doors to your compassion;  
Universal Spirit, inspire us to sing and sigh for justice;  
Spirit of Jesus, teach us to walk,  
to work, to pray, to live, to love,  
your way.

Awaken our dreams,  
expand our visions,  
heal us for hope,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen