

Living our Dreamtime **Pentecost 22 – 24th October 2010**

Readings:

Joel 2: 23-32

Dear God, we come to you here as your people in this place. We ask you to open our hearts and minds so that we might become channels of your love; so that the message you have given us today might be heard and acted upon, and that the dreams and visions that your Spirit gives us for tomorrow, might become a reality through our faithfulness to your living Word. AMEN.

Why do we come to church? Why are we here today? Well, that's simple! Perhaps we're here (on a good day) to hear the Good News proclaimed. Perhaps we're here to be with friends, or perhaps we're here to listen for a message that will make us feel good. Perhaps we're here to be comforted. And that's OK. It's great to hear a sermon that will comfort us in our times of trial.

Hallelujah! Praise the Lord, we say.

But this sermon is not going to be one of those. How could it be, with the challenges given us in our readings for today? The challenge given the religious leader who thinks himself better than others, only to be told by Jesus in our gospel that all who exalt themselves will be humbled and all who humble themselves will be exalted. This is a word of challenge for believers. A word of challenge for the Church. Especially for a church that at times sees itself as better than most people.

A word of challenge for each of us. It challenges rather than comforts. And it is a word of challenge, this morning for Pilgrim, as we seek to find just what it is that Christ would have do in his name.

Not that long ago, I attended a Presbytery meeting where we spent some time talking about what is going on in our congregations. It was an opportunity to set out what it is that we do here at Pilgrim. And it would have been tempting to say, "look at us, see how well we're doing. Our congregation is growing, we still have children in our services, we've got a great *UnitingCare* agency next door that we work closely with. We have a lively playgroup that has grown in recent months, and our premises are fully used during the week, Maggies, etc, etc etc. Aren't we good! "

But how could I, how could I without sounding a little like the Pharisee in the gospel. A gospel message this morning is a constant reminder that our praying, our ministry, is never about us, it's always about a loving God who is continually showering us with gifts of grace. And for all the things that happen in and around Pilgrim we are still a fragile community caught in the world of the 21st Century that tends to marginalize the church.

But we also have another reading this morning from the Hebrew Scriptures that should

bring us up with a jolt. The prophet Joel ministered to a community that had rebuilt itself after the devastation of the Exile, only to be further devastated by a locust plague. So he brings a message of hope and assurance from God to his people. A message that is told over and over again by the prophets, of how, if we turn to God, great things will happen in our lives.

Well despite all the great things that are happening in our congregation, perhaps some of you are a little like me. Wondering where all the younger families are today, for the majority of them are not in churches. Perhaps some of you, like me, feel that our church congregations have been devastated in recent years by the locust of secularism that seems to threaten the very existence of churches as we now know them. And perhaps, you, like me, are wondering how and in what form we will continue to worship in twenty years time.

Well Joel's message of hope and assurance is for us! It is incidentally the same message that Peter took up in his Pentecost sermon, when many on that first Pentecost must have wondered fearfully where the infant church would be in 20 years time. With the resurrection of the Lord, Peter believed that the day of the Lord had arrived. God had poured out his Spirit upon all flesh, and their sons and daughters would prophesy and their old men would dream dreams and the young men would see visions.

Everyone, from the highest to the lowest in status would share in the outpouring of the Spirit.

A great message of hope for Peter's hearers at Pentecost. A great message of hope for us. These are the signs of a church made alive by the Spirit. Are these the signs that characterize our congregation at Pilgrim?

Do our sons and daughters prophesy? And prophesy is not mere fortune telling. Prophets throughout the ages have been both men and women, sons and daughters who have called upon their people to return to God's ways, to practice justice and mercy with those with whom they live; and to warn them of the consequences of failure to live godly lives. I wonder, do we have such prophets in our midst? In Launceston, do we call upon our neighbours through our actions to follow God? Do we speak out against the great social evils of our day? Do we warn them about the consequences of leading greedy and self centred lives? For this, like prophets of old, is what we are called upon to do when the Spirit is poured out upon us. Not easy!

And then there is our dreaming. What about the dreams we dream?
It is a truism - we need dreaming to live.

Don't take my word for it, ask your doctors. Better still ask an Aboriginal person in Australia about what happens when their dreaming is taken away. Even better still, listen to one of them as she mourns at the taking away of dreaming from her people. A poem by Oodgeroo of the tribe Noonuccal - a woman formerly known as Kath Walker.....The poem is called: We are Going - for Grannie Coolwell

***They came in to the little town
a semi-naked band subdued and silent.
All that remained of their tribe.
They came here to the place of their old bora ground
where now the many white men hurry about like ants.
Notice of estate agent reads: "Rubbish May Be Tipped Here".
Now it half covers the traces of the old bora ring.
They sit and they are confused, they cannot say their thoughts:
"We are strangers here now, but the white tribe are the strangers.
We belong here, we are of the old ways.
We are the corroboree and the bora ground.
We are the old sacred ceremonies, the laws of the elders.
We are the wonder tales of Dreamtime, the tribal legends told.
We are the past, the hunts and the laughing games, the wandering campfire.
We are the lightning-bolt over Gaphembah Hill
quick and terrible,
and the Thunderer after him, that loud fellow.
We are the quiet daybreak, paling the dark lagoon.
We are the shadow ghosts creeping back as the campfires burn low.
We are nature and the past, all the old ways
gone now and scattered.
The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.
The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place.
The boar ring is gone.
The corroboree is gone.
And we are going."***

A prophetic word about the danger of losing our dreaming, of losing our connection with the spiritual. And in many ways European settlement of this land has led to a dying out of aboriginal Dreamtime. We have deliberately or inadvertently stopped their dreaming and as a people they are dying. So elders, men and women like Oodgeroo, are doing the dreaming now, returning to the ways of their ancestors in order to breathe new life into their people. They are daring to dream again connecting with the Spirit.

And we are being called to do likewise. Old men and women, filled with the Spirit, are being called to dream - to dream so that our churches might live on.
Do we have dreamers, dreamer of a future time? I wonder?

Or are we stuck in the past not game to look forward, fearful of what might happen to what we remember, what we love. Our churches need to change if they are to reach out to our neighbours around us.

O Lord, we need dreamers! To dream up your kingdom, your future so that children like Oliver might have a place where he can point to and say, not just that he was baptized here, but that this is a place that is making a difference in the community he will grow up in. And I believe that the Spirit is showing us a way forward here at Pilgrim. We do indeed have a

vision. A vision whereby this congregation and set of building will remain open to the community around it.

Next Sunday we traditionally celebrate Reformation Sunday, a time when our ancestors dared to dream new dreams. Dreams that were necessary to deal with the new world of 400 years ago. And you know, some of us are still living off those dreams. Yet our world in the past 40 years has changed far more dramatically. Perhaps the Church needs a new reformation. To be formed once again by the Spirit, as in Joel's day, as in Peter's day, as in Luther's day. For our sons and daughters to once more see visions. Are we capable of such dreaming? Are we open to the Spirit of God?

Pray God that dreams continue to be dreamt, and visions given, so that here in Launceston, all may experience the love of God and that our church might remain relevant to the world around it.

Rev Tony Duncan
24th October 2010
pilgrim.tony@tassie.net.au