

The scripture readings for Pentecost are very fitting to the theme of Reconciliation and parallels to the lived experiences of First People within these passages. In Acts 2 the imagery of fire describes the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples.

Fire is a prominent symbol for many First People. It is a necessity for hunting, cooking and keeping warm and is also spiritually significant. For many First People, traditions such as storytelling, dance and art are passed down around the campfire. In smoking ceremonies, native plants are burnt and the smoke then cleanses the land and defends against evil spirits. Fire is also a sign of new life.

In recent times, we have come to learn about the benefits of cultural burning. Especially how this practice prepares the land for increased fruitfulness.

Reading the scriptures and preparing for today, I couldn't help but recall the recent fires across the nation and how this fire descended upon us – tongues of fire –leaping, raging, fear, darkness, destruction, confusion, disturbance.

Yet within the fire experience there were unifying elements – communities coming together, politics, aid, resources, Aussie battler and mateship, neighbourliness, sacrifice for others, self-giving.

Then the aftermath, for the county/nature at least – we are experiencing some form of regeneration, of new life out of the scars

One image still sits in my mind is a photo



that seemed to mimic the Aboriginal flag. Rose Fletcher took the

photo at Victor Harbour as the sun rose on New Year's Day ' just after sunrise, when the fires were arguably at their worst, and hearts were heavy and people were frightened - me included,' Mrs Fletcher told Daily Mail Australia.

As I reflected this week on this photo and reconciliation and Pentecost, I wrote these words as a poem

Pentecost Reconciliation

*Flames and fears
Chaos and tears.*

*Fires severe
Arrivals draw near.*

*Red: blood ingrained:
Earth stained
History shamed.*

*Pentecost flame –
Wonder and strange
Confusion of voices
Culture and choices.*

*Peace in the dove
Peace from above
Reconciliation....
Together a nation.
(Bob Hutchinson 2020)*

This image of nature resembles something deep within our nation's history and theology. Fire, smoke and sun –able to create an image of the Aboriginal Flag? (pause)

Many saw this as a biblical 'sign and wonder' that we should listen to the First Peoples, and especially around fire and fire prevention and cultural burning. That we should listen to their struggle, to the real history of 'the Arrival', to the fire and smoke of colonisation and the blood spilling, rejection and removal of the First Peoples.

In the Acts reading, fire is also a symbol of new life. It is the new life of the Holy Spirit, vital to our lives as Christians. Just as fire has contributed to the nourishment of people over the years, so the Holy Spirit nourishes God's people.

Acts 2:6-11 goes on to describe the Holy Spirit causing the disciples to speak a variety of languages. *The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies*, states that prior to colonisation there were 250 First Nations languages in Australia, with an estimated 800 dialects. Presently, there are only 13 First Nations languages being passed onto younger generations.

This is a great cultural loss, as a direct result of colonisation. It is devastating to realise that many Indigenous languages that carried tradition and knowledge for thousands of years are now forever lost due to the policies of colonisation that insisted First People conformed to the 'dominant culture', including the use of English to the exclusion of all other languages.

These policies disregarded the value, history and richness of Indigenous languages, and First Peoples suffered abuse and punishment for speaking their own languages similar to the disciples being rebuked for using their own languages as recorded in Acts 2:12-13.

John Van der Laar says: The marks of Pentecost have all too often been seen as personal, supernatural experiences and the benefits of Pentecost have been understood as personal edification, personal euphoria and personal strengthening.

Sometimes, the Pentecost experience has even been used as the basis for **separation** and **division** of one group from another, and as the justification for withdrawal from the world

But, in every community, every neighbourhood and every church God's Spirit seeks to enable people to "speak one another's languages", to welcome and serve one another, and to work together to serve and empower those who most need help and compassion.

When God's Spirit fills us we find ourselves being "sent" to serve others. We find ourselves seeking to bring peace and reconciliation between people We find ourselves seeking to understand those who are different from us, and we find ourselves reaching out in compassion and service to those who are marginalised, excluded, rejected.

So, Rather than "lifting us up"- above others into a group that is somehow favoured by God, Pentecost "pulls us down" to connect with those that we would never naturally have the strength or inclination to relate to. Rather than leading us out of the world, Pentecost drives us back into it, to **proclaim and live** the prophetic message of God's reign, as Christ did.

Can we hear, or sense, the Spirit driving us out to proclaim God's grace and peace, reconciliation and hope to those who are different from us?

In what ways are we being equipped and called by the Spirit to bring people together and to serve others and to share in the experience of God's presence and activity among us, one humanity, one creation?