

## **Acts 2.1-21**

### **John 15.26-27; 16.4b-15**

There is a retreat centre called the Hermitage near Mittagong in the southern highlands of New South Wales. Near the entrance there is a large dam, and on the dam live some geese. It's a beautiful peaceful spot surrounded by vineyards and grazing cattle. I am always nervous about going near the dam though because of the geese. They can be quite protective and territorial and they have chased me before.

In May 2006 at Pentecost, Bishop John McIntyre preached here to the diocesan synod. He spoke of the Celtic image for the Holy Spirit, the wild goose.. "A wild goose is a dangerous animal", he said, "some people even employ geese because they are better than watchdogs. Have you ever been bitten by a goose? They hurt. They are powerful birds."

He continued, "And a wild goose is not an easy bird to control. In ancient Celtic spiritual tradition, "Chasing the Wild Goose" was a symbol for seeking to go in the way the Spirit of God calls us to go, and I have a sense that the whole phrase about a "Wild Goose Chase" finds its origins somewhere in this kind of symbolism. We use it in a certain way in our daily conversation. Essentially, when you "chase a wild goose" you don't really know where you are going to end up."

"Moving with the Spirit of God can sometimes be like that" Bp John said.

"There is a sense in which, when we are captivated by God, there is that dangerous element to it. There is that risk; there is that excitement; there is that thing that surges into us; there is that adrenalin burst, and there is that possibility that the goose might actually turn around and nip you, and that can hurt."

"Certainly, the image of the wild goose as a symbol of the Holy Spirit leaves us in no doubt that we cannot domesticate the Spirit of God..

“Do you see where I am headed?” Bishop John asked, “God is not to be domesticated. The great danger of organised religion is that we do domesticate God.”

That’s a very different stance from the Book of Acts Chapter 2 where we hear of the coming of the Spirit.

Sarah Bachelard writes:

‘The disciples are gathered together on the day of Pentecost, there’s a sound like the rush of a violent wind, divided tongues – as of fire – rest on each person, and they begin to speak in other languages. They’re accused of being drunk, although it’s only nine o’clock in the morning. So Peter rises to address the sneering crowd. This is no babbling rabble, he cries! It’s the fulfilment of prophecy. It belongs to the story of the people of Israel. It’s the culmination of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, who is now exalted at the right hand of God. It is he, Peter says, who ‘having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit ... has poured out this that you both see and hear’.

Cut to the heart, the crowd asks Peter, Peter, the earlier bumbling deserter, and now strong orator, what they must do. And he tells them to turn back to God (repent), to hand themselves over without conditions (be baptised in the name of Jesus), and so receive the gift of this same Spirit, this energy of God’s own life.

‘The word ‘receive’ is key. Jesus has ‘received’ from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit; the disciples will ‘receive’ in turn this same Spirit when they give themselves over as Jesus did.

The Spirit cannot be seized or earned, it cannot be grasped or possessed. It is only ever given as we are radically given over to God.’<sup>1</sup>

‘Jesus is wholly transparent to the life of God – he receives his life wholly as gift. This is how we too are invited to let ourselves be sourced – personally and corporately.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Bachelard [http://benedictus.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/pentecost\\_230515.pdf](http://benedictus.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/pentecost_230515.pdf)

On the Feast of Pentecost, we remember that the church is only the church insofar as it receives its life this way, sourced in the life of God... the untameable Spirit. The church is nothing other than this – not an organisation, not a system, not an institution. It lives and is life-giving only as it practises an ever-deepening self-emptying and dispossession, transparent to the divine life. And that is why contemplative prayer is always a necessary feature of the church's life and key to its renewal.<sup>2</sup> And we here, are building opportunities for contemplative prayer in this place with meditation groups, contemplative services, silence during worship on Sundays, and the silence is deepening as we too let go, and become transparent to God' life in us.

'... In truth, we the church fail time and again to live from and entrust ourselves to the possibility of the transformation we proclaim. And this matters..., because we have been invited to live from a different reality, vitalised by a different energy. The energy of the Spirit of God which, as Jesus showed, is present always as life-bestowing, reconciling, liberating, challenging.

This is the gift we're commissioned to share – through our work, our service, our relationships, and our daring to embark on our own journeys of healing and transformation...<sup>3</sup> prodded by that Holy Spirit wild goose.

Bachelard again:

'What's needed (in our world) are people and systems... filled with love of truth, moved by compassion, unafraid to die in the service of authentic life. What's needed is the subversive, counter-cultural energy of the Spirit.'<sup>4</sup>

It was Pentecost at Saint James' Anglican Church in King Street in the centre of Sydney. I had taken off my alb and stole and was sitting on the shoulder of a dancer holding a red candle in a glass bowl high up above the marble floor. I slid down to the floor. We danced to the singing of psalm 104, in the sanctuary and down the aisle. At one point, by mistake, the male dancer kicked the red candle in the glass dish. It slid from the cross aisle down towards the sanctuary.

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<sup>2</sup> Bachelard

<sup>3</sup> Bachelard

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Bachelard [http://benedictus.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/pentecost\\_230515.pdf](http://benedictus.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/pentecost_230515.pdf)

There was a collective gasp! I improvised and ran down the aisle, picked up the candle and placed it safely to one side. It seemed like that is what was meant to happen! That dance was risky, and wild and rehearsed and planned, but the Spirit took us in a different direction to what we had rehearsed, making a strong point about who was in control!

‘At the Feast of Pentecost, we remember that this Spirit is given to any who will open to receive it. Mostly it won’t look dramatic – the rush of a mighty wind. Often it will feel like grief, or a painful and deepening awareness of the depth of our need for healing and acceptance. But as we dare to yield ourselves, as we dare to receive, we become bearers of this gift to others. We are emboldened to live from its energy and proclaim its truth. We become able to give ourselves for love of the world, as Jesus did. And so we become, at last, the church we are called to be, a church that is indeed good news for the world.’<sup>5</sup>

Did you watch the Royal Wedding last night and hear the preacher? The preacher Bishop Curry said:

“Imagine governments and nations where love is the way, “Imagine this tired old world when love is the way — when love is the way, unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive! ... When love is the way, poverty will become history.”..— “let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”.

“Christianity”, he said, is “a movement grounded in the unconditional love of God for the world and a movement mandating people to live that love and in so doing to change not only their lives but the very life of the world itself.”

So as Bishop John urged, “Let us dare to chase the wild goose!”<sup>6</sup>

Susanna

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<sup>5</sup> Bachelard

<sup>6</sup> Bishop John McIntyre, *St Paul’s Cathedral, Sale, 8am Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2006 (during Synod)*

