

**St Mary Magdalene's Anglican Church**  
**Moore Street, Adelaide**

**Reflection for Pentecost**

Patrick White, the Nobel Prize winning Australian novelist, wrote of a defining moment in his life: "During what seemed like months of rain I was carrying a tray load of food to a wormy litter of pups down at the kennels when I slipped and fell on my back, dog dishes shooting in all directions. I lay where I had fallen, half-blinded by rain under a pale sky, cursing through watery lips a God in whom I did not believe. I began laughing finally at my own helplessness and hopelessness, in the mud and the stench from my filthy oilskin. It was a turning point. My disbelief appeared as farcical as my fall. At that moment I was truly humbled". He later wrote in a letter: "What I am increasingly intent on doing in my books is to give professed unbelievers glimpses of their own unprofessed faith."

There is something primal about Holy Spirit: it belongs universally to the human condition. Spirit is fundamentally about an encounter or engagement with everyday reality. It comes as gift: it is not a possession. It's an attitude, not an opinion. It's about making "harsh and saving sense out of what we experience here and now". We don't make Spirit happen. We don't tire the muscles of our mind in order to believe. "We find ourselves addressed, and in being addressed, we find ourselves". Spirit is always relational: it is about Spirit coming into visibility: it is truly the Bread of Life.

Ruth Cracknell, the Australian actor, wrote of a defining moment in her life when her husband died. "It is the most precious moment I have known: it is the most surprising moment because entirely unexpected. And if this moment I can keep, then nothing more do I need, now or ever. We are not, and this you must believe, in an empty room, but in a space suffused. We are golden; we seem for a tiny fragment of time, holy; a medieval painting ..."

Ruth Cracknell is less an observer of life than a participant. And this is telling us something fundamental about the Spirit of God. She is not positing or placing God or the divine into her experience: she finds mystery, wakes up to a presence already there. It's another dimension, a dimension of depth and richness. And she is sure: not in the sense of proving or mounting a case for anything, but bearing witness to her lived experience. Spirit comes always, is ever-present, often surprising, coming to us not so much as bringer of power as opener of eyes. Waking us up to what is in front of our eyes! In this space called life, "suffused" with Spirit, the bread of our lives is broken and we find life.

Les Murray, the distinguished Australian poet, writes of a way of being in the world that strikes him as a palpable conviction that life has meaning and that it matters. "From earliest childhood I was always conscious of a strong, sometimes frightening, sometimes deeply necessary current of sheer meaning in things and people, a pressure of significance that rarely carried over into what people consciously said. The world was resonant and radiant with meaning and, knowing this, how could I speak as if none of it mattered, or leave it out the way people seemed to do".

"A pressure of significance" suggests moments and experiences that carry with them a "surplus of meaning", that bring us messages from Beyond, and speak into our lived experience that the life we are living needs no "Why?": that it simply needs to be lived, with wonder and gratitude. Such moments are "moments of grace, "events of Spirit", where "our minds are nourished and invisibly repaired". Covid-19 does in fact offer us, in all its terror and deadliness, opportunity. Perhaps instead of keeping on saying we miss the opportunity to be at Church and the Eucharist, we can rejoice: relationships are suddenly immeasurably

precious: time and space that we might not otherwise have had bring us untold gifts: and far from arguing about how a piece of bread becomes Jesus (which the Church has argued about for centuries), the Spirit of the Risen Christ, the Spirit of Pentecost offers us the true miracle, of how Jesus actually becomes a piece of bread, meeting us in our everyday. “Come Holy Spirit, and overshadow us, enliven us with grace, and enfold us in love”.

Philip Carter  
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