

# Homily for People and Parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2025, Pentecost

Readings: **Acts 2:1-21**

Romans 8:14-17

**Psalm 104:26-36**

**John 14:8-17 (25-27)**

I think many of you would have seen the musical movie, with Hugh Jackman, called ‘The Greatest Showman’. The story and songs of this movie imaginatively tell the story of Phineas Barnum and his circus. There are many sermons that could draw from themes within the movie, and they include love and hope, and how we relate with people in society who are deemed to be ‘other’ or ‘less’.

Early in the movie the young Phineas sings to a girl called Charity about the many possibilities he imagines for them, in a song titled ‘A Million Dreams’. As a boy, and a man, he sings:

*“I close my eyes and I can see, a world that's waiting up for me that I call my own.  
Through the dark, through the door, through where no one's been before,  
but it feels like home.*

*They can say, they can say... it all sounds crazy  
They can say, they can say... I've lost my mind  
I don't care, I don't care... if they call me crazy  
We can live in a world that we design!*

*'Cause every night, I lie in bed, the brightest colours fill my head  
A million dreams are keeping me awake.  
I think of what the world could be, a vision of the one I see,  
A million dreams is all it's gonna take.  
A million dreams for the world we're gonna make...”*

As the story unfolds Phineas and Charity have significant up and downs in their life together. In that journey there is bigotry and prejudice of many kinds; there is ambition and greed; pride and temptation; success and failure... but, Phineas and Charity keep coming back to a dream in which love, faithfulness, and hope are constant themes.

When life feels pretty ordinary, and we have been battered and bruised... a dream, or a vision, of a better life can keep us going. Indeed, it can give our lives a sense of purpose because we sense that we have a part to play in making that imagined future possible. Possible not only for ourselves but also for others. When we have a sense of purpose, we have a sense of who we are, and how best we can use our lives.

About two thousand four hundred years ago the land of Judah, in what is now called the Middle East, was battered and bruised by a plague of locusts. This was a catastrophic event for food crops were lost and many people were left with little or nothing to eat. The prophet Joel offered hope by assuring the community that God would bring this time to an end, and that there would come a time when people would again *'eat in plenty and be left satisfied...'*

He went on to say that at a later time God's Spirit would be poured out on all people; that the sons and daughters of those struggling would prophecy; that their old men would dream dreams; and their young men see visions. He continued, that when this happened God's Spirit would even be poured out upon male and female slaves (Joel 2:28-29). Approximately four hundred years after Joel spoke and wrote those words they were quoted by Peter as he tried to explain an outpouring of God's Spirit on a large gathering of people fifty days after the remembrance of Passover. In the very well known, and much loved, reading from Acts that we heard today (Acts 2:1-21), there was apparently a sound like rushing wind, tongues of fire, and an astonishing God given ability to speak in different languages.

People wondered what was going on and somehow Peter had the courage to remind the gathering of Joel's ancient prophecy. That in fact this was the time when God's Spirit was being poured out on all people not just some. This was the time when young men and young women would prophecy; when old men would dream dreams, and young men see visions. This was the time, he continued, when God's Spirit would even be poured out upon male and female slaves.

It's incredibly hard for us to imagine just how astonishing and counter cultural this thinking would have been. There was in the long history of Jewish faith an understanding that God's Spirit would speak to and through a chosen few, and empower an even smaller number of people to do extraordinary things. The priests of the Temple, the judges and the prophets, and the kings all claimed such authority but on that first Pentecost morning something very different was demonstrated. God's Spirit could empower and speak to, and through many people. Whether they be men or women, Gentile or Jew, slave or free... God's Spirit could empower and enliven ALL people.

I don't want to dwell on the tongues of fire, or the sound like a rushing wind! I want to focus on the role that God's Spirit has in giving dreams and visions. For we may often slip back into old ways of thinking which suggest that God's Spirit can only inspire and empower people who are Ordained by the Church as deacon, priest or bishop.

But, Pentecost and the experience of God's Spirit in the early Church, suggests otherwise. It suggests that each of us have God given gifts and abilities; and each of us have a part to

play in making God's love known. Somehow, we each have a part to play in making our congregation, our local community, our society, and perhaps the world, a better place.

When we think about the life of our community, perhaps our congregation, our Parish, or local community: how do you think it could be better? Could can you and I, through prayer, seek the guidance and inspiration of God's Spirit to discern, with others, a renewed or new vision, for our congregation and local community? And, how can we be part of making that renewed or new vision reality?

Let's not stop there! What about our society, and Australia's relationships with other countries in the world? Surely there is the potential for new vision, new hope, and new purpose?

As we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost this day, and the work of God's Spirit in each of our lives... may that same Spirit give us the wisdom to discern new vision, and the courage to work with others to make it real.

Would you please join me in prayer...

Gracious God, we give thanks for the transforming work of your Spirit. In these challenging times we ask that you give us vision for a better future, and the courage to follow your leading. We pray in the name of the One who calls us to follow, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen