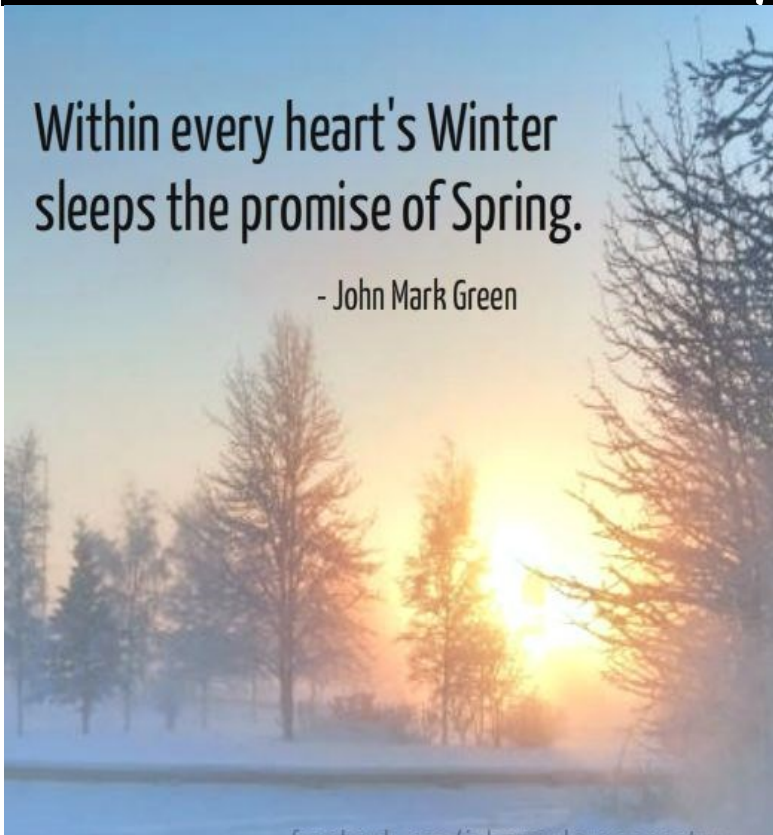


INTERACT

Quarterly

Within every heart's Winter
sleeps the promise of Spring.

- John Mark Green



Endeavour Hills Uniting Church Mission Statement

The Endeavour Hills Uniting Church...

a worshipping, nurturing, learning community...

an open door, reaching out to show Christ's face to all.

'Together We Grow.'



ENDEAVOUR HILLS UNITING CHURCH

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The Endeavour Hills Uniting Church web site maintenance is overseen by Church Council. Please send all correspondence etc. to the Secretary, Judy Hopkins.

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Please note:

The views in the articles included in this publication are not necessarily those held by the Endeavour Hills Uniting Church.

FROM THE MINISTER

It is a privilege to once again be writing in the Winter edition of Interact. It is the season of Pentecost, a time when we celebrate the birth of the Christian Church and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and is our Comforter (John 14:18) and Counsellor (John 16:8) who empowers, renews and equips the body of Christ to be a witness to the redeeming work of God in the world.

The Holy Spirit is represented by a dove, fire and wind. The Hebrew word for Spirit is '*ruach*' and means 'breath'. The Holy Spirit then, is the 'breath of God' which filled the first disciples and continues to fill us today. However, if I am honest, there are times when I feel filled with the Spirit, so energized and passionate, and other times when I feel the exact opposite.

I remember a number of years ago, coordinating a three-day youth conference. With over 300 teenagers, 60 volunteers and 11 presenters and speakers, it was a huge event. During the entire conference, I was so filled with Holy Spirit that I felt like the Energizer Bunny. God was so faithful to the prayers covering this conference that, over the three days, we witnessed over one hundred young people commit and recommit their lives to Christ. Yet one week later, for me, everything changed spiritually and I felt low and deflated. I no longer felt the presence of God as clearly and found myself becoming strangely distant from God. I felt disconnected. The Energizer Bunny had lost its hop!



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From the Minister

This lack of God's presence with us is a common spiritual condition amongst believers. I believe the issue is not an absence of the Holy Spirit for God is always with us. Rather, too many Christians today accept that feeling distant from God is normal and being energised, passionate and filled with God's presence is abnormal. Imagine the changes in our faith if Christ's followers turned this belief around. Imagine the transformation that would take place if the people of God expected the breath of God to not only fill them but overflow from them. What if the first Pentecost was not just a wonderful moment in history but a daily reality in our lives? Imagine...

Robin Yang

THE SYMBOL OF THE UNITING CHURCH



The Uniting Church emblem represents “The Cross of Jesus Christ, in its light and love stands over a darkened world — redeeming it through grace and truth. “By that cross his people in heaven and earth are bound to Him and to each other.”

The Holy Spirit, symbolised by the dove with the wings of flame, empowers and guides us to be witnesses to Jesus Christ.

“The wide ‘U’ at the bottom of the emblem points to the fact that we are uniting. As a semi-circle it reminds us also that the renewing of both church and world are as yet incomplete.”

The emblem symbolises “something of the vision”, reminding people of the gospel’s centrality in church people’s work and “the need for constant reform and renewal” as well as the commitment to worship, witness and service.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PENTECOST

*“Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths” (v. 16a).
Deuteronomy 16:16–17*



Christians from all theological traditions make at least a passing mention of Pentecost when it arrives during the liturgical year. Yet the small degree of attention Pentecost receives in comparison to Christmas and Easter indicates that most of us probably do not see Pentecost as very important. In truth, Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, was among the weightiest festivals of the old covenant.

Today's passage reveals Pentecost's importance under the old covenant, making it one of the three festivals each year when every Israelite male had to be in Jerusalem (*Deuteronomy. 16:16–17*). Other feasts could be kept in one's hometown, but Passover, Pentecost, and Sukkot (the Feast of Booths) all required a pilgrimage to the City of David. Even during the more sombre feast of Passover, these pilgrimages were doubtless times of great rejoicing as friends and family would have opportunities to visit together. More important, the covenant people of the Lord gathered together in one place, much as when all Israel received the Law at Mt. Sinai (*Exodus 19–24*).

Speaking of the old covenant law, in time ancient Jews came to associate Pentecost with the revelation of God's law to Israel. This does make sense when we consider that Pentecost under the old covenant was primarily an occasion on which to thank the Lord for

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The Importance of Pentecost

providing the grain the people needed for survival (*Leviticus 23:15–22*). God’s law is likewise necessary for His people to thrive spiritually wherever they may be, so Pentecost was as good a time as any to rejoice in the revelation of the Torah to Moses. However, since the Mosaic law by itself produced death and not life in the nation (*Romans 7:7–12*), it also makes sense that our Creator would later choose Pentecost as the occasion on which He poured out the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2:1–10*). During a festival when the people thanked God for giving them grain and for giving them His law, the Lord gave the Spirit of life, who alone can enable us to fulfil His holy standard (Galatians 5).

In every era, it is appropriate to thank God for His provision for our needs, whether material or spiritual, through generosity to Him and the poor; thus, Pentecost under the old covenant was a time to feed the hungry alongside the giving of offerings to the Lord (*Leviticus 23:15–22*). May we never fail to be generous to God and to those in need, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Coram Deo (In the Presence of God)

Matthew Henry comments that at Pentecost “none must appear before God empty, but every man must bring some offering or other, in token of a dependence upon God and gratitude to him”. It can be easy to think that our blessings are things owed to us and then to forget to thank the Lord for all that His good hand has provided. Let us strive not to fall into this sin but to thank Him for giving us everything we need.

<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/importance-pentecost/>

THE RAINBOW — A REMINDER

Sometimes people say they prefer the “God of the New Testament” as being much gentler than the “God of the Old Testament”. It’s kind of ironic, when you think about it, seeing as it is, of course, the same God. Beyond that, the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) present many images of God’s gentleness and compassion.



The earliest stories in Genesis and Exodus often portray God trying to form a relationship with the odd creatures that God has made in the divine image. Like any new relationship, it takes time. God gets angry but often relents.

Case in point: in the story of the flood we are told that God destroys everything except the creatures preserved in the ark. Yet immediately following, God places something in the sky as a reminder not to do this again. Curious thing, this reminder. Firstly, it is a bow. Not the kind of bow with which you might tie up a package, but the kind with which you might shoot arrows. “I’m putting it away,” God says. “I’m converting a weapon into a Technicolor thing of purest beauty.”

This is first and foremost a reminder to God. Yet we, of course, see the rainbow too and remember God’s promise never to destroy the earth again. The question then becomes, how will we respond here on our side of the rainbow? Will we remember God’s promise and embrace it as our own, or will we carry on with business as usual?

FINDING THE WAY OUT



God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13

There's a street with an intriguing name in the city of Santa Barbara, California. It's called "Salsipuedes," which means "leave if you can". When the street was first named, the area bordered on a marsh that sometimes flooded, and the Spanish-speaking city planners dubbed the location with a not-so-subtle warning to stay away.

God's Word cautions us to stay away from the "wrong road" of sin and temptation: "Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way" (*Proverbs. 4:15*). But Scripture doesn't just say "leave if you can". It offers assurance and tells us where to turn: "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (*1 Corinthians 10:13*).

Lord, I praise You that You are willing to give me all the strength I need! The promise that God will not allow us to be tempted above our ability to withstand is an encouraging reminder. When we turn to God in the moments when temptation comes, we know He is more than willing to help us stay away.

The Bible affirms that Jesus is able "to empathize with our weaknesses". But He was "tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (*Hebrews. 4:15*). Jesus knows the way out of every temptation. He will show us as we run to Him!

James Banks. Reprinted from 'Our Daily Bread' with permission

THE LOVE OF GOD

Some weeks ago, I was invited to conduct the funeral service for a very old friend. I based my reflection on an idea I found in missionary Lesslie Newbigin's book on John's Gospel, *The Light has Come*.

In the book, Newbigin said the way ahead is closed by a curtain beyond which we cannot see. But I found comfort in Paul's writing to the Romans – that there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord (*Romans 8:39*).

And what do we know about the love of God? Psalm 23 sets before us what life in the house of the Lord 'my whole life-long' might be like – green pastures, still waters, the restoration of one's soul, protection from enemies, assurance of goodness and mercy.

Reflection:

Psalm 121 reinforces these ideas about the love of God, and contains these lines:

The Lord who keeps you will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord will keep your life from this time and for evermore.

Joan Addinsall



QUOTES & COMMENTS

In the nick of time, when we were getting into more and more of a hopeless mess, God's Chosen died for the sake of those who couldn't care less about God. Not many would offer to die for a righteous bore. Now and again someone has the courage to die for a person whose qualities they admire. Jesus died for us when we were rotten to the core, and that puts God's love in a class of its own!

Romans 5:6-8, from John Henson, Good as New: A Radical Retelling of the Scriptures

Compassion without joy and celebration, without action and public justice-making, without ideas and ideals, without passion and caring, without a consciousness or a way of living, without cosmic and divine awareness and interaction, is not compassion at all.

Matthew Fox, A Spirituality Named Compassion

In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer.

Albert Camus

Creativity is allowing oneself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.

Scott Adams

A rainbow is a rainbow only and precisely because it is made up of different colours. We are placed on earth to discover that we are made for togetherness, for interdependence, for complementarity.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

I believe that at the centre of the universe there dwells a loving spirit who longs for all that's best in all of creation, a spirit who knows the great potential of each planet as well as each person, and little by little will love us into being more than we ever dreamed possible. That loving spirit would rather die than give up on any one of us.

Fred Rogers, Life's Journeys According to Mr. Rogers – Things to Remember along the Way

THREE BLIND MICE

It was a hot afternoon in a country church. The farmers were tired after harvest, as were their wives.

The sermon began. Soon the preacher noted lots of heads nodding. A wife dug her husband in the ribs and woke him up. Maybe it was a boring sermon?



But the preacher would have none of that. He began to recite, “Three blind mice, three blind mice see how they run. They all ran after the farmer’s wife...” In a flash, heads jerked up, eyes opened, and the preacher chuckled and said, “Now we are all awake, I’ll go on!”

I reckon most of us have lost concentration in a service. It is a very human experience. In Gethsemane, the disciples fell asleep while Jesus was praying. At this crisis point in his life, Jesus rebuked them – “Would you not watch with me one brief hour?” – and then kindly said, “Sleep on now, and take your rest.” He knew there was much ahead for them.

Maybe there is a way forward when we lose concentration in church. Somewhere the Spirit would have given us a message in a hymn, reading, prayer or sermon. The children’s address has gems too.

A little reflection may ring a bell. There may be a personal message somewhere.

Reflection: At the end of each letter to the churches in the Book of Revelation, there is a wake-up call:

“He who has ears to hear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Look up one as a Bible study. Is there a message for you there?

Bill Pugh

GOD'S KINGDOM REIGNS



The Lord calls me to join his flock,
In fields of gold and on velvet, green mountains,
Under azure skies and soft white clouds,
By flowing streams and crystal, blue fountains.

The change in me is through his word,
Calling me gently to live life right,
Bestowing me with immeasurable joys,
And leading me with his wondrous light.

He walks beside me each and every day,
His word is my comfort and my guide,
He provides me with fire when my days are cold,
He is always and forever by my side.

His promise to me is abiding and forever,
There is no life without his love,
A gift of grace that overflows,
Boundless treasures from heaven above.

Sue Ashley

SOME THOUGHTS ON ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 (NKJV)

¹ Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.

² Do not be rash with your mouth,
And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God.
For God is in heaven, and you on earth;
Therefore let your words be few.

³ For a dream comes through much activity,
And a fool's voice is known by his many words.

⁴ When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it;
For He has no pleasure in fools.
Pay what you have vowed—

⁵ Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. ⁶ Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? ⁷ For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.

Ecclesiastes 1: 1-2 Vanity of Life (NKJV)

“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

King Solomon in his twilight years teaches us that life not centred on God is meaningless and purposeless (*Ecclesiastes 2:25*). When we fail to rely on God, our lives become meaningless. When we pursue worldly pleasures or treasures with hopes and expectations, in reality, they become meaningless, like ‘chasing after the wind’. Are we prudent in our living carefully before God, keeping His commandments?

In verse 1 King Solomon says, “Draw near to hear”. In verse 2 he advises, “Do not be rash with your mouth and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God and let your words be few”. “Since God is in heaven and we are on earth”, he counsels humility.

In Matthew 13:9 Lord Jesus says “He who has ears to hear, let him hear”. He means more than an audible sound of a preacher but we also hear when we read His Word.

Lakshman Pethiyagoda

LIVING ALOHA

The Hawaiian word aloha has many meanings. It is most often used as a greeting for both “hello” and “good-bye” but it is also the word for “love”, “mercy”, and for the biblical concept of “shalom”.

On the island of Kaua‘i, “aloha” also refers to a unique program involving the Kapa‘a Elementary School and Kapa‘a United Church of Christ. The Aloha Peace Project began with the vision of former school teacher and church member, Laura Taylor. She envisioned the community working in harmony and peace, and realized if they were going to do that, they had to start with the children.



Taylor has written a curriculum that is used in the local elementary school and is supported by a resource centre housed in a “peace room” at the church. Many church volunteers assist the school staff, support the project with prayer, and prepare craft materials. The curriculum includes a variety of interactive activities such as storytelling, puppet shows, and crafts to help build self-esteem, teach diversity, and develop relationship skills.

Fourth-grader Brylyn Aiwohi says, “I like Peace Project because I like how they can stop bullying”. Other issues that are addressed are cliques, respect, teasing, and drug use.

The children learn a standard response – with both words and actions – of “stop, think peace.” In a session on emotions, Laura Taylor tells the children, “We don’t have to hide under happy faces. We can let people know how we’re feeling. We know that when we have a problem we can...” and the children respond with enthusiasm “stop, think peace”. It’s good advice we could all learn.

THE BANK TELLER



In Melbourne's Sydney Road in Brunswick, there is a taxi at the kerb outside the bank. As I enter through the glass doors, a young man walks towards me. His arm is outstretched as if to make a space ahead of him. With his other arm he is guiding a woman dressed in long flowing robes and a hijab.

The young man looks sharp and confident, wearing the bank's corporate dress code. As he shows his customer out, there is something about the quality of his attention that captures mine. He is decorous, almost tender – not something I expect from a buff young bank teller.

As he and his customer pass me I catch a glimpse of the woman's face. In the small section visible between the headscarf across her forehead and under her chin, her face is a mass of scarring. As the bank teller gently ushers the woman, I see that she has no nose, just two holes in her face. Her eyes are milky and appear blinded. Tall, erect and softly spoken, she is engaged in conversation with the bank lad and he leans his head close so he can hear.

The small act of mutual respect I have just witnessed sees me teary in the bank foyer. The woman's scarring is alarming. I wonder what searing cruelty or misadventure she may have met with. You cannot walk past unaffected. Human cruelty and human kindness, they sit so close up.

Reflection

The bank teller carved out a space for the scarred woman to walk in. How do we make space to honour people who bear visible and invisible scars?

This is an extract from *Spinifex Blessing*, stories of faith and life by Julie Perrin available at ctmresourcing.org.au/spinifex-blessing.

Julie Perrin

Contributions to Interact

Any material you may have to be included in Interact may be sent in one of two ways:

1. e-mail (preferred method) to interact@ehuc.org.au putting “Interact” in the subject line
2. leave in the green Interact folder which is located on the stand to the right of the kitchen window.

Your contributions of up to **450 words** are very welcome, **BUT please include your name, phone number &/or email address in case it is necessary to contact you.** Material should be submitted by **12 noon** on the deadline dates indicated below:

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