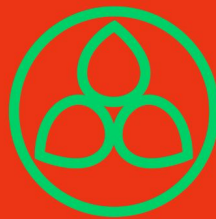




PENTECOST RETREAT



ARNA
Anglican Renewal Network Australia

ARNA PENTECOST PODCAST 2023 *The Holy Spirit and Study*

Today is *Saturday*, the *10th* day of *June* and day 6 of this week's podcast series exploring the vital role of the Holy Spirit in enabling our study of the wisdom and ways of God.

What are we to do when we don't know what to do? How are we to pray when we don't know how or what to pray? We look to the Spirit to intercede for us, to speak up for us.

In some forms of televised quiz shows, the option to phone a friend is regarded as one of the lifelines that may be allowed. When it comes to our communication and communion with God, the Spirit is the ultimate friend and teacher!

When our Lord taught his disciples how to pray, one foundational petition is to seek God's kingdom to come and will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. But I suspect that to be granted an audience in the heavenly court to petition over the messiness of life on earth is likely to leave me tongue-tied!

Yet God is a God who communicates. Being created in the image and likeness of God gives us some capacity to communicate. The creativity and faculty of language can certainly be meaningful, and forms of language are many and varied. But words often fail me. And that's OK. While God delights when we take time and care to express our thoughts, concerns and gratitude, there are occasions when we can sit with the inexpressible and know that God knows.

It has been observed that one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is as the ultimate go-between dimension of God. God is Spirit, and that same Spirit resides in us when we commit ourselves to Christ – both personally and corporately. God is not distant but draws us into his eternal Being in ways that surpass words and visualisation.

John 14, verse 26

But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.
[NLT]

With that sense of anticipation, I focus now on being drawn into God’s Presence

I join with the desire of God’s people throughout the ages, in the words of Psalm 63:1-4. I’m using Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase in *The Message* at this point:

*God—you’re my God!
I can’t get enough of you!
I’ve worked up such hunger and thirst for God,
traveling across dry and weary deserts.
So here I am in the place of worship, eyes open,
drinking in your strength and glory.
In your generous love I am really living at last!*

And so I pause and pray, using a prayer of St. Augustine of Hippo

*Breathe into me, Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be holy.
Move in me, Holy Spirit,
that my work, too, may be holy.
Attract my heart, Holy Spirit,
that I may love only what is holy.
Strengthen me, Holy Spirit,
that I may defend all that is holy.
Protect me, Holy Spirit,
that I may always be holy.*

I Reflect.

Paul has described the sufferings of the present time as akin to the labour pains of child-birth. Without minimising the frustration, futility and depth of pain that comes with human experience, he also affirms that we are not alone or spiritually abandoned. With the ascension of Christ the promised Holy Spirit has come upon all God’s people, young and old, male and female. And the Holy Spirit goes to places deep within our being, speaking to us and for us – the God-between God indeed:

Romans 8:26-30

In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.

I feel I am walking on sacred ground in this paragraph. I am conscious of my finiteness, the limitations of my understanding and imagination. Yet the Spirit *helps* us and even intercedes *for* us. Paul reflects elsewhere that when he is weak, then paradoxically he is strong, for then he is dependent on the grace of God.

The workings of the Spirit are certainly beyond our comprehension, but the imagery here is profoundly personal. The Spirit is not a power or force, and here the Spirit is more than a presence. The Spirit relates to us, prays for us, and engages meaningfully between the God who searches our hearts and conveys our groans and the mind of the Spirit who brings our desires and the purposes of God into an alignment of will.

I Challenge Myself.

While there is much that I don't know, there are foundational truths that I *can* affirm with confidence. Verse 28 begins on that note, our confidence in this truth grounded in the teaching of the Spirit: ***We know*** that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

I can sit with many of the great questions of life and faith, not because I have it all worked out, but because I know the One who does. To 'know' here is not a cognitive attribute – some know more than others. No, Paul's use of 'to know' (and foreknowledge) is the language of relationship. In holding the tension between present suffering and weakness and future glory and inheritance, God's knowledge of us before we even know ourselves holds us in a place of love and assurance.

We find comfort not in any capacity of our own to master things, but in trust the benevolent purposes of God whose love is displayed in the death and resurrection of Christ. There is much that we don't know or understand about God, but all that we do glimpse and observe is good.

And so I listen once again to this profound truth, instructed and assured by the Spirit:

In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.

I am struck that the Spirit is mindful of me. We often think that others are too busy for us. The voice of the evil one in my head may encourage a sentiment of 'who do I think I am?' Feelings of insignificance and of being unworthy lie in the background of many of us. Yet the Spirit is mindful of *me* – and of all who have an awareness and love of God revealed in Christ and mediated by the Spirit. Like a child, our questions of God can be endless. At the end of the day, it is not what I know, but *whom* I know.

I pray, adapting and adopting as my own a prayer of Pastor Paul C. Stratman

O Father in heaven, look upon all your people who struggle with anger, anxiety, doubt, frustration, guilt, hopelessness, loss, memories, lack of patience, pain, regret, sadness, selfishness, temptation and weakness. Your Holy Spirit assures us "All things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." And that means that you make all these things work for your good purpose in our lives, even when we do not understand. Remind us of your invitation, "Cast all your cares upon me," and of your assurance that goes with it, "because I care for you." ...through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.