




News Letter

20 May 2020

Our Church on-line

Naracoorte Uniting Church web site: <https://www.naracoorteuca.org.au/>

for the service on-line and for another great Kid's talk from Fiona.

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Service this Sunday, May 24

Reading: **1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11 and 1:6-9**

Stuart Martyn will bring us the message this week: "*Fiery Trials*"

Some Prayers of the people

- Gracious Father, we continue to pray for our leaders of Government in this country. We thank you that the restrictions on movement and commerce have begun to ease. We ask that your guidance continue to inform the mind of our prime minister and the leaders of the State governments together with the senior health officers in dealing with this pandemic.
- We pray for material aid to the poor including many Christians in countries that are in lockdown but without any government assistance. We pray that in all countries the allocation of emergency relief would be on the basis of compassion and need and not driven by intolerance and religious persecution.
- Gracious Father we continue to pray that your healing hand will be upon Lyn Pitt, John Kester, Kay Hocking, Dean Williams, and Denis Russell. Kay has returned to Flinders Hospital this week.

Mid-week Bible Reading

Acts 1:1-14

New International Version

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ²until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵For John baptised with water, but in a few days, you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'

⁶Then they gathered round him and asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'

⁷ He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'

Matthias chosen to replace Judas

¹² Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. ¹³ When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

The Holy Spirit is God's gift of himself to us. Jesus promises his disciples that they will be baptised with (or in) the Holy Spirit; that is drenched, saturated, steeped in the Spirit of God.

This is what Jesus promises in John 14: 16-20: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth...¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."

Jesus is now at the Father's right hand in heaven, but God is still right here with us. The gift of the Holy Spirit is a gift of power, but not for the sake of power.

The disciples ask Jesus if he was now ready, having risen to life again, to re-establish the Kingdom of Israel. Some were still looking for this forceful reinstatement of Jewish sovereignty.

But Jesus' promise is a promise of power to evangelise and to win hearts and minds with the gospel of grace - "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth". This is the "power of love" not the "love of power".

And there is a sense of urgency and a call to be ready and realistic about all this "why do you stand there looking up in the sky" say the angels. "Don't leave Jerusalem" says Jesus, "wait for the Holy Spirit".

The reading from Acts highlights what a small group it was that God used to begin the process of transforming the world with the gospel – a group of men and women, mostly from the rural district of Galilee (Luke names the men and mentions the women including Mary, Jesus' mother) – a small enough group to meet in one room.

But, in this time following the resurrection of Jesus, this small group was far from being devastated by the death of their leader. They didn't disperse; they didn't run; they waited expectantly, and they prayed constantly and together. Clearly the resurrection had impacted them with hope and with purpose even before the gift of the Spirit was given. Indeed, as Chapter 1 of Acts goes on to describe, the apostles used the waiting time to elect a replacement for Judas Iscariot. This was a group that beginning to see the magnitude and urgency of the mission they had been called to.

We the Church must have the same attitude. We have been given the Spirit, power to witness to the truth, and we have been given the certainty of resurrection hope.

In this time when the whole world is collectively holding its breath, we can use the time to pray and to wait for the opportunities that God will give us to be Jesus' "witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Because Jesus is alive and because his Spirit is alive and active in us and in the world, because we have his promise that he will return, and because we have his clear directive about what he wants us to do, we should stop "looking up into the sky" but get about this task he has given us, in the power, this soft power, that is his gift.

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