



Picture: Kathleen Mackay

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The great storm of April 2015 in the Diocese will be remembered in small and large communities. The loss of lives and the serious damage to peoples' community will have a lasting impact as people try to rebuild the structures of their life. Living in days without essential services and cut off from what we expect from our city, suburbs and towns we are faced with what is vital to our living.

Companionship, kindness, courage and the bonds of being in a crisis together keeps hope alive. It is the spirit of our community that helps us through dark times, and for people of faith in this Pentecost season it is the Holy Spirit who gives hope to the yearning, power to the powerless and courage to the failing. It was wonderful to hear of parish op shops and halls being available to help people in need and offer meals, sanctuary and friendship. Faithful volunteers and chaplains to their community were the gifts of the Spirit to tired and weary hearts.

As we mark Pentecost the season of celebrating the Spirit in the city to bless and gather all people, I ponder the changes in our built worlds of urban and rural communities and the spirit that we nurture. When Dr Elizabeth Farrelly of the Sydney Morning Herald gave her address in the Cathedral last year she said "I think we have a crisis in our city-making. And I think that this crisis, like the environmental crisis, is fundamentally a crisis of the spirit. It's about how we relate to ourselves, each other and our habitat." She wasn't simply speaking of the corruption

revealed in the dealings of business, property and politics as uncovered by the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Elizabeth Farrelly described the relationship between the "soul of the city and its body", the relationship between the values of the city and the built forms. She contrasted the way we think of the city as an object to be used to that of subject to be lived within. She called it the "Jesus thing".

"In Darwinian terms, this is the difference between co-operation and competition. In psychological terms it's

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'us' and 'them', inclusion and exclusion, used in the establishment of hierarchy/status. In social terms it is the difference between connectivity and isolation. In philosophy, it's the difference between instrumentalism and phenomenology. In spiritual terms, it is a Jesus thing. To apprehend the Other as subject implies the radical openness you can only call prayer or love. ...Good cities are like coral reefs, where all kinds of creatures poke their noses into or out from unexpected places."

In times past parish churches served as

a central focus for the whole community – a "common ground" or that "third place" to which people turn and give life to city or village. In his book, *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg suggests that this "third place" is where citizens of a community or neighbourhood meet to develop friendships, discuss issues, and interact with others...they nourish relationships and a diversity of human contact." My travels to various communities tell me that our churches engage and seek to offer such life.

I found this to be particularly true in the experience of Rough Edges, a ministry of St John's Darlinghurst and its commitment to engage the street community on its doorstep. When during a difficult time of helping and working with the homeless I had a message as the Rector on my phone telling me that "the church ought to look after the ratepayers and not the down and outs". Yet we nurtured a soft space where people from all backgrounds could be church in this "third place", a place of the Spirit that comes on all flesh young and old, men and women, outsiders and insiders.

When we experience injustice and marginalised people as a church we need the Spirit to help us be more than great Eucharist, teaching or fellowship though these are vital but not sufficient. The prophet Isaiah (*Is 56:1-8*) brought a message to a returning exiled people who were trying to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. God was calling his people to a holiness in the city which offered salvation and redemption to the stranger, alienated and outsider.

In maintaining justice and doing what is right (*mishpat* and *sedeqah*) the people would find well-being. *Is 56:8* the prophet repeats the word "gather"; "Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered."

When as a chaplain at the Medically Supervised Injection Centre in Kings Cross I met people with all kinds of self-harm who needed a sanctuary and a place to begin again. They came in suits and in op shop handouts, gifted and talented, confused and exiled people working out their spiritual and emotional needs with illegal drugs. Somehow the city had brought them to this hard place, but I knew that the Spirit was still wooing them to the Father's heart. They and we all need a spiritual place to begin again – a church which lives in the Spirit to bring new life to the city and town.

In Tim Foster's recent book *The Suburban Captivity of the Church* he explores how "the gospel.. has aligned itself very strongly with suburban values." When he made the move as a priest in a suburban Sydney parish to an inner city parish he encountered hostility to evangelical Christianity. Yet he also found how many folk had values akin to the Bible's concern for the marginalised, justice and a desire for authentic community. "Suburban people are fundamentally aspirational; what drives them is moving towards a settled, secure safe existence. The suburban gospel suits this because it gives you eternal security." But he says the "power of the gospel is felt when it is brought into meaningful engagement with the narrative of a culture....In Jesus' life, death and resurrection a new order has come. There's a new way to be community, and this new order turns the world upside down. It challenges all our values."

After the storm and after Pentecost will we allow the Spirit to so shape our lives to be the people that transform our communities?

+Greg

PRAYER POINT

The Holy Spirit is life-giving life,

Universal mover and the root of all creation,

Refiner of all things from their dross,

Brings forgiveness of guilt and oil for our wounds,

Is radiance of life, most worthy of worship,

Wakening and reawakening both earth and heaven.

(Hildegard of Bingen)