

I have noticed, and you may have noticed too, a lot of re-imagining going on of late. The most obvious example we have in Canberra at the moment is the dispersed Floriade festival where the organisers 'reimagined' the festival and gave out bulbs and flowers to many churches and community groups, including my own congregation at Tuggeranong Uniting. We planted these flowers, with on bed in the shape of the UCA dove, and erected a sign proclaiming "Floriade Reimagined" with the intent of inspiring some hope, anticipation and wonder in our local community.

In my inbox this week, I found other reimaginings. From Airbnb, I had 'Reimagine your space' that advised me to beautify my inside space by freshening in up with some bold wallpaper, lights and added textures, and to bring the outdoors inside and add some life and energy with suitable greenery. Domain newsletter recommended that I reimagine my pantry and other disorganised areas in my life by decluttering and developing a new organising system.

I found myself thinking this reimagining resonates quite well with the reading from Acts 2 this week. Here were the disciples, together in one house and wondering what they were going to do next. Then bang! Along comes the holy spirit to freshen and liven things up, even to the point of bringing the disciples into the outdoors from the house they had been living in and providing each with a flame-like light on their heads. Speaking boldly to the crowd in the native languages of those gathered there, the disciples tell the exciting story of God's coming in Jesus, a story reimagined from long-held traditions to one people and now extended to everyone. The early church had been born.

As we wait for restrictions to be eased back and start thinking about when we may be able to meet in small groups or as a church again, perhaps now is the time to start reimagining what we might look like as a church and reorganise ourselves into a new system that is better orientated to our 21st century communities. Until a vaccine is developed, there will be stringent requirements around what number can meet safely in our buildings, and cleaning and disinfecting protocols. We probably will not be able to meet together in large numbers for some time. The microphone will not be able to be shared. Morning tea and communion will be challenging in terms of how we share objects between people.

In this space between what was and what will be, like the disciples we need to do some discerning. We need to try and grasp that the virus has affected how people gather, how people live, how they think and how they relate to each other.

We will need to think through our mission strategy. People will still be wary, grieving, in need, and hopefully asking some deep questions. What can we, as a church, offer into this space?

Some things we could be pondering include:

How we still offer an online church where people can gather that can't attend on Sunday mornings; consider being a church of small groups rather than being entirely centred on larger congregations; think of different kinds of worship at different times to Sunday; consider how we could use our facilities in more missional ways; think about how we could relate better to those outside our congregation; think about how we become missional people rather than Sunday morning attenders and management people.

When the disciples gathered together for this Pentecost they found themselves swept up in a chaotic movement by the force of the spirit. They were compelled to leave behind much of their accustomed worship practices and traditions and were pushed to start cultivating what would become known as the Christian Way. They put far less emphasis on gathering and much more emphasis on making disciples.

This very early church never gathered around buildings and budgets, it was comprised of small communities that centred around sharing their story of Jesus, and the faith, hope, and love that defined him and his ministry. It was defined, not by where and when they gathered on Sunday, but by how they served God in community.

How might we reimagine this church? How might we use this opportunity to discern where the spirit is moving us and reflect a new revelation of the Christian story?

We have an opportunity presented to us that allows us to clean out what is not working or needed anymore, and to replace it with something alive, relevant and bursting with the life and hope of the gospel story. Let's not waste it.

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