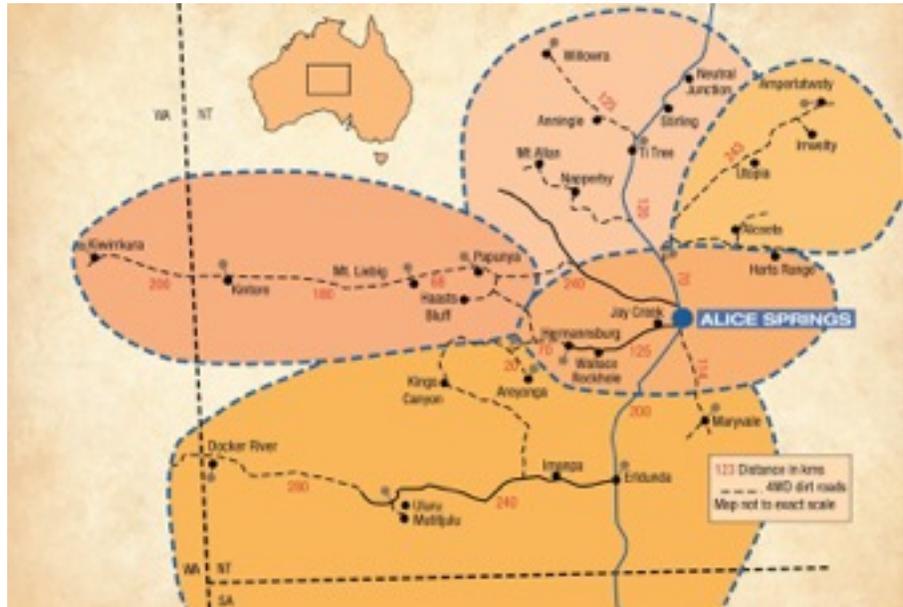


Pentecost Day-St Paul's Box Hill Pastor Rob Borgas-Finke River Mission

Worship at Box Hill today is a bit like the day of Pentecost. There are people from many different places and cultures gathered together to give thanks to God for his great gifts. And we're singing praises to God in many different languages. How amazing!

But, it cost a lot of money and took a long time for many of us to get here, particularly those people from Docker River. And it's hard work trying to sing the hymns, hear God's word and follow the liturgy in 3 different languages.

On the day of Pentecost, many Jews were gathered together in Jerusalem for the festival of *Shavuot*, where they gave thanks to God for giving them the law at Mt Sinai. They had travelled a long way from many different places. But they didn't have to struggle like us to understand each other. That's because the Holy Spirit gave Jesus' disciples the power to speak many different languages.



I'd love to have that power today, but I haven't. So if your first language is not English, you might have to listen really hard to understand me. Sorry about that!

This service would be a lot easier for all of us if we all spoke the same language. And it would be a lot better if we all lived close to each other so we didn't have to travel so far to get here. Imagine that. Imagine if we all lived in the same place and spoke the same language. Wouldn't the world be a great place....

And, that's exactly what the people of Babble thought.

Gen. 10:32-11:9. After the flood, Noah's descendants became nations and spread all over the world. At first everyone spoke the same language, but after some of them moved to the east and settled in Babylonia, they said: Let's build a city with a tower that reaches to the sky! We'll use hard bricks and tar instead of stone and mortar. We'll make a name for ourselves, and we won't be scattered all over the world. But when the LORD came down to look at the city and the tower, he said: These people are working together because they all speak the same language. This is



just the beginning. Soon they will be able to do anything they want. Come on! Let's go down and confuse them by making them speak different languages--then they won't be able to understand each other. So the people had to stop building the city, because the LORD confused their language and scattered them all over the earth. That's how the city of Babbble got its name.

We might be tempted to think it's a good idea to all be the same, like the people of Babbble. But God says no! He understands what we're like when we all join together in one place and speak the same language.

Human beings are constantly tempted to unite together for all sorts of reasons because they know how powerful it can be. Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Ze Tung, and Pol Pot all understood the power of bringing people together in the same place, for the same purpose. But we all know the dangers of doing this.

Today, our leaders try to bring everyone together for more modest reasons; to save money. That's why we have big cities like Melbourne, because it costs less money to employ, house, educate and care for people than it does in the bush. Or so they say.

Recently the WA Liberal govt. has started the process of closing hundreds of small Aboriginal communities because the Federal government no longer wants to fund them and now the states can't afford them. The plan is to bring all these people into major centres where things should be much cheaper for everyone. But what impact will these changes have of the culture and language of the people involved given that this is all connected to them living on their traditional lands? What social problems will develop in the regional towns these people are moved to? Will the government really save money in the long run?

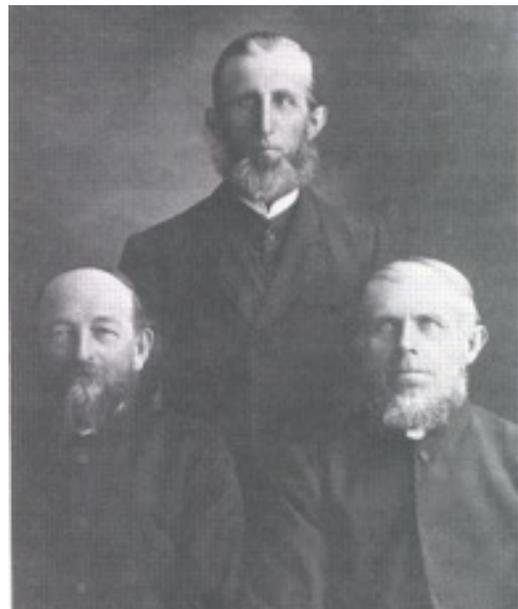
In 2008, the NT Labour Government implemented a new education policy that students and teachers must only read and write in English for the first four hours of each school day, even if they come from a community where English is their fourth language. Ironically, the education minister at the time was an Aboriginal Labour politician from Darwin. This policy could have seriously impacted the literacy rates of local Pitjanytjara speakers if not for one Areyonga Lutheran who complained to the Human Rights Commission on behalf of her child that this policy was discriminatory. The government later dropped the policy.

God knows what we are like. He made us and he knows it is not good that all people have the same culture and language, and try to live in one place, separate from the rest of the world. That's why He made us speak many different languages so that we would spread out and care for the whole world in lots of different ways.

On the day of Pentecost, God could have let the disciples just speak their own language and start their own team. And he could have given power to those people who had gathered there from many different places, so they could understand the language of the disciples and join their team and start a big church in Jerusalem.

But God didn't want the church to grow that way. Instead, his Holy Spirit gave the disciples power to speak to these visitors in their own language. And that's how God started the church, that how God's word was spread. Jesus did not tell the disciples to stay in one place, but to go out to all the different nations and make them part of God's family, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey his laws.

The first missionaries learnt to become pastors in Germany, a long way from Australia. They had to travel for months in a boat to get from Germany to Adelaide. Then it took 2 years travelling on horseback to get to Ntaria. They grew up speaking the German language. Then they had to learn the English language so they could live in Australia. Then they had to learn the Arrarnta language so they could share the good news with the people at Hermannsburg. That was hard for them. But the Holy Spirit gave them the strength so they could bring God's word to the people of Central Australia.



And notice how the missionaries didn't just build a big church in Hermannsburg and expect all the Aboriginal people to come there and be taught and baptised only in German, English, or even Western Arrarnta. Instead, they sent out evangelists like Moses Tjalkabota (photo) and Kamutu (photo), who took God's word to other other places and language areas that were foreign and

even dangerous for them to travel to.

We often forget that different Aboriginal families and tribes were often at war with each other before the missionaries came. But God's spirit was with these first evangelists, and gave them the

powerful message of God's love and reconciliation through Christ that slowly put an end to most of the revenge killings that used to be common-place. Kamutu was quite likely the first Christian martyr in Central Australia and possibly the first and only Australian Aboriginal martyr.



This morning we see many different choirs from different communities and languages all joined together to glorify God through song. And like a boomerang, these combined choirs are about to take that same message of reconciliation back to the people who sent it to Australia in the first place, more than 175 years ago. And it will be interesting to see the response the Germans give them considering their cultures are so completely different.

But I'm confident that God's Spirit works powerfully through song to unite us in ways that go above and beyond our human differences, while still respecting them.

You people here at this church today come from different places, different cultural backgrounds, and some of you speak different languages. And I think that's great, because it makes the world an interesting place. But what's even better is that we can all join together and worship the one God who brings us all together through the one faith and baptism to receive God's forgiveness through eating and drinking together at the one table of his son Jesus Christ, no matter where we come from or what language we speak.

What an amazing picture of reconciliation we have here today. What inspiration we have to take out with us when we go out into the world. Amen.