

Sermon on John 20: 19-23
On the Closing of Kangaloon Church

I had a wedding here a couple of years ago and following the service as I came away I found a cigarette butt on the ground.

As I looked at it I felt an upsurge of anger the strength of which surprised me somewhat.

It seemed so disrespectful to this place of worship that had not only provided hospitably that day but had been maintained by the faith of generations for over 150 years.

I realised that Kangaloon had become a part of me.

And I had come to love it as ministers often do with their churches, especially little country chapels like this one.

So I felt defensive.

I felt it was a kind of desecration. An insubordination. A dis-grace.

We're all here today because for some reason or another we love this church.

This place of people and faith set in a rural community, built by local farmers and tradesmen, that has never had a working bathroom, has become a part of us.

And today we come both to celebrate its life, all it has meant for over 150 years, the faith it has nurtured, the laughter and sharing of its people, and at the same time to say goodbye.

It's a mixed day, of mixed feelings.

And that's how it should be.

We feel the sense of loss of a place we have loved which carries with it many, many memories of people we have loved.

And while we may know that in the end the church is really the people, not the building, still we know a deep attachment to this little church in the field.

A sense of belonging. Families have lived and prospered here, worshipped and witnessed, died and mourned for well over a century.

If I feel something of this belonging after only four years or so, I can hardly imagine the strength of feeling for those of you who have deep roots in this community.

The memories of the church for me will persevere.

I will remember it full on Christmas Eve, singing carols and sweltering in the summer heat with naked flames everywhere.

With only one exit and only two functioning windows, I'm sure it has never really met the fire code.

Or I will remember the children following the monthly services throwing their kite flyers around and kicking the deflated soccer balls up and down.

Or I will remember the sharing of communion only a couple of months ago with a group no bigger than the little band of disciples in the upper room with Jesus all those years ago.

I will cherish these memories as I'm sure each of you will those you yourself hold of Kangaloon Uniting Church.

They will enrich my faith as time goes on and continue to give me hope for the future.

What Kangaloon has been doesn't die today, we will carry it on ourselves, each of us.

I'm sure it will be the same for you.

The witness of Kangaloon UCA won't be lost to the Kingdom of God, for it will go with you and continue to be expressed in the world through your life and faith.

In the passage we've heard today from the book of Kings, the great prophet Elijah hands on his mantle to his prophetic successor Elisha.

Elijah says to Elisha, 'Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken from you.', and Elisha replies, 'Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit.'

In effect he is saying, let me be doubly blessed before you leave me, so that I might carry on your witness and message.

On Easter Sunday this year we shared in the final regular service for the church and I think anyone who was there would agree it was a great blessing in every way.

It embodied everything Kangaloon has been.

There were 20 or so children representing successive generations of Sunday Schools.

There were old time Kangaloon people representing its long and proud history.

There was a picnic lunch with home baked food and the home made cow to 'milk' representing its farming heritage.

There was worship and there was community and there was fun.

We recognised the remaining members of the church and gave thanks to God for their faithfulness in this final part of its life.

We were blessed by each other's presence and the spirit of grace that was apparent on the high day of the church's year.

We remembered that what matters most is that Jesus is risen from the dead, and so whatever is going on around us, we need never fear, for our lives are kept in God.

But it was a blessing that everyone there that day will carry with them, me included.

It will inform our ongoing witness as we take on the mantle of living in the love of God beyond this day, of living the life of faith Kangaloon has helped nurture for us.

That day was indicative of the blessing Kangaloon has been to so many over time, a blessing that it is now handing on.

Today is Pentecost, the day we remember the gift of the Spirit and its breathing life into the church.

In our Gospel reading for today Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on his frightened disciples and sends them out into the world.

As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.

All those years ago the disciples were wondering where things were going to go from here.

They were struggling to imagine what would happen now it seemed Jesus was going away from them.

But Jesus is calm and says to them, 'Peace be with you.', and sends them out to forgive the sins of the world in his name.

The disciples must be brave enough to leave their security behind, but they won't be alone in this new task of faith, as the Spirit will go with them.

It will be their strength and light always, in all the challenges ahead.

And so it is for us today.

What we must remember is that those who worshipped within these walls, who found a spiritual home here, worshipped the Lord who was never bound by earthly dwellings.

All church buildings subvert themselves by pointing to the God whose spirit always calls the church out beyond itself into the world and who doesn't live in temples made by human hands.

We carry faith in our hearts, in our lives.

It is informed and shaped by the places of memory and love and worship we have known, but never bound by them.

This chapel was a Wesleyan Methodist church, well when John Wesley was told he couldn't preach in the establishment church buildings any more, he simply went out and preached in the fields, probably fields not at all unlike the one in which this church is situated.

In closing the church today, we pay special tribute to its remaining members who made the decision together.

As much as I have wrestled myself with the question of what to do, I believe it is the faithful and right decision.

That you have done this thoughtfully, without conflict or bitterness is a testament to your faith and courage for which I give thanks to God.

You have been a witness to me in this time.

We leave this place together, arm in arm, just as its community has lived and worked together for all its many years.

So for you, and for all Kangaloon has been and meant, and will continue to be in memory, we say in faith what those who have worshipped here have said since the beginning.

In all things and at all times, glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, so now and ever shall be, world without end, church without end.

Amen.