

Reconciliation Sunday

Acknowledgement of Country

The Ancient of Days, breathed life into this Land and her Peoples. From time beyond our reckoning the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have blessed this place through their care and concern.

From river to ocean
from campfire to hearth
**may the First People
who have cared for this land
be blessed.**

From breath to song
from step to dance
**may those who follow your Songlines
guide us on the journey
to living honourably in this place.**

From greeting to Amen
from silence to chorus
**may our worship
join with the voices
of the First Peoples
of this Land.**



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Setting the scene

Today is Trinity Sunday - the Sunday after Pentecost that draws together the church's celebrations over the past months and reminds us that the God we celebrate in Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection, the one known to us in all of creation, the one present with us in the very breath of life - this God is always beyond our human descriptions and stories and expectations.

It is also National Reconciliation Week - from the anniversary of the day in 1967 when a referendum gave Aboriginal people full citizenship rights (27 May) to the anniversary of the Mabo decision in 1992 recognising our indigenous brothers and sisters' traditional and customary right to land (3 June).

The theme this year is "More than a word. Reconciliation takes action".

And so we are invited to recognise the part we need to play in seeking reconciliation - with God, with all of God's people, and with our indigenous brothers and sisters, in particular. Brooke Prentis, the CEO of Common Grace and Aboriginal Christian leader, calls us to "Rethink Reconciliation as friendship" and goes on to say "maybe if we thought about Reconciliation as friendship, we could close the gap a lot quicker". She also encourages us to consider that reconciliation must involve truth, justice and action.

The final paragraph of the Statement from the Heart encourages a movement, First and Second Peoples together, the people born of this spectacular and ancient land together with all those

who have migrated here, declaring a new way forward, announcing the rightful place of First Nations voices - a new way shaped by truth telling and treaty.

Today we are invited to participate in one of the major themes of our Christian faith - God was in Christ reconciling the world.

In the Uniting Church, in 1994, we entered into a covenant with the Uniting and Aboriginal Islander Christian Congress.

In 2009, the preamble to the UCA Constitution was added recognising the presence of God the Creator in this ancient land and with her peoples long before any colonisers came.

The 15th Assembly 2018 declared First Nations Peoples were sovereign and quoted from the Statement from the Heart to describe that co-existing sovereignty together with the 'spiritual' nature of sovereignty under the Creator God.

Video - Reconciliation Takes Action

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=KNAkfPrsC9Q>

Readings

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ²Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³And one called to another and said:

'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.'

⁴The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'

⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.' ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'

John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' ³Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' ⁴Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' ⁵Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' ⁹Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' ¹⁰Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹ 'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Hear what God's Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection

Let us pray...

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, break into our understanding and our living and lead us to embody your love and grace in the world of which we are a part. Amen.

Trinity Sunday is often said to be the one Sunday each year every preacher tried to avoid. And there is certainly good argument to be had about how useful it is. After all, this is one of the celebrations of the church that has no direct reference to the Scriptures - it celebrates an understanding, some would call it a doctrine, rather than a story or event in the life of the people of God.

But having said all that, it does offer to us an idea, an opportunity - the idea that the God we worship, the one God, is known in three different ways - as the Creator of all that is, as the Saviour of the cosmos (John 3:16), as the Spirit that sustains the very breath of life.

Each of these three experiences of God are enough of themselves and yet all of them together point us to the wonder and mystery of the God who is, even more, beyond our images and words and attempts to describe.

And even though we experience God in these different ways, it is always one God - different but one. The God we see and hear in the wildness of the wind and waves is the same God we experience in the gentleness of a friend's touch, the same God we see in Jesus as he teaches, heals, challenges and sets free, the Jesus who comes to the whole of the cosmos, to you and to me, not to condemn us but to set us back on the way God intends (John 3:16-17). This is a God with many different forms but who is deeply relational within Godself - different but one.

And this is the the thing that deeply matters - different but one.

Just as we experience God in different ways but God is still God, so when we gather, we experience God's people, God's creation in a whole lot of different ways, but there is something more that draws us together and unites us. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are deeply inter-connected: with our God, with each other, with the environment/world we inhabit. Our differences may be in physical appearance, or the way we think, maybe even in the way we think about God, or the way we live, but we are drawn together in God - and together our differences make us more than we can be on our own and more than we can imagine.

What if, instead of seeing our differences as reasons to divide, we could see our differences as expressions of the God who creates, saves and sustains us?

What if, our differences are an expression of God - not about us, but about God's self?

Our interactions then, rather than being competitive or divisive, become a dance, an embrace, an interaction that strengthens and builds up everyone involved!

And so as we try to live into one-ness, celebrating difference rather than using it as an excuse to exclude, today we are asked to think about how we do that with our indigenous brothers and sisters, particularly when our record to date has been one of division that has led to exclusion, dispossession, suffering, poor health outcomes, high incarceration rates, and a sense of hopelessness.

God comes to us offering us relationship and reconciliation - with God's self and with each other - restored relationships that enable us to recognise difference, to celebrate what each person and group brings, and to realise that together we are more than we could ever have imagined. But we have some hard work to do. Our indigenous brothers and sisters are still living in poverty, affected by ill-health, much of which our ancestors introduced, discriminated against far too often and over-represented in our criminal justice system.

We, personally, may not have caused the destruction inflicted on the First Peoples of this land, but we benefit from their dispossession and when we continue to ignore their current plight, we are complicit.

I am not going to tell you today how to fix it or what you should do - I can't.

Instead, I want to encourage you today to do three things:

First, listen to the voices of our indigenous brothers and sisters. Listen to what they are asking. If you have not yet read the Uluru Statement from the Heart, then start there (link below).

I have also included some links in the online materials to a number of voices.

I want you to read their stories.

And then - we could ensure that an acknowledgment of country is offered every time we gather - whether for meetings or fellowship or Bible Study - bring forward our recognition that the land we live and work and worship and play on has been cared for and is known by a people who are now mostly invisible in our communities.

And lastly, seek out, get to know and make friends with Aboriginal people and spend time with them. Walk with them on their country, invite them to share their hopes and dreams for this land and its peoples.

The God who in God's self is deeply relational, who calls us to recognise difference but work together into one-ness, invites us to participate in the reconciliation of the whole world.

God asks Isaiah, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8)

The question is also directed to you - how will you respond?

Let us pray,

Creator and Parent of all that is,

Saviour and Redeemer of the cosmos,

Spirit of all that breathes,

draw us together into your love,

help us to embrace the differences we see in each other,

and help us embrace a vision for our community that is more together than we can ever be apart. Amen.

Other Resources to explore

Uluru Statement from the Heart:

<https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement>

Uniting Church - Assembly Resources:

<https://uniting.church/nrw2021/>

<https://uniting.church/covenanting/>

<https://resources.uca.org.au/resources/covenanting/item/135-covenanting-statement-1994>

Uniting Church - NSW/ACT Synod Resources:

<https://nswact.uca.org.au/first-nations-resources/>

Common Grace

A good place to start:

https://www.commongrace.org.au/aboriginal_and_torres_strait_islander_justice

Treaty video:

<https://www.commongrace.org.au/treaty>

Brooke Prentis, Common Grace - A Sermon for Reconciliation Sunday

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1IY15ZKzmnhcALbv-3y-01uhA8x9ErubU>

Eternity News - What's One Thing You Want Non-Indigenous Christians To Know?

<https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/whats-one-thing-you-want-non-indigenous-christians-to-know/>

Benediction: Aboriginal Blessing

Brooke Prentis

May our footsteps, on these ancient lands,
remind us of creation and connectedness, in our search for truth.

May the Gum Tree, from its roots to its branches,
remind us to dig deep and reach high, in our action for justice.

May the Eagle, who soars in the sky,
remind us of the power, in our call for love.

May the expanse of the lands and seas, of the sky and stars,
remind us of God's timing in our faith in hope.

May the Holy three, Creator Spirit, Lord God, Papa Jesus,
remind us of community.

So with grace, mercy, and peace, go in truth, justice, love and hope.

https://www.commongrace.org.au/blessing_brooke_prentis