

Conquest or Community?

Gathering

A video can be found at: <https://vimeo.com/570093862/72fce6e7d2>

It includes the Welcome to Country and the Prayer for Healing as well as the Bible readings and reflections.

Acknowledgement of Country

Today, at the beginning of NAIDOC Week, a celebration of the history, culture and achievements of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters, we acknowledge that we live and worship on land that has been cared for since time immemorial by the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

The theme for NAIDOC Week in 2021 is “Healing Country”. We pray for the healing of country, the healing of relationships, the healing that brings peace and reconciliation.

Have a look... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uU4bHAgRkdl>

Today is also the national day of the United States of America, the land of the free, a nation that has offered so much to the world and, at the same time, is one of the great colonisers.

As we worship today, as we listen for God’s voice in our worship and in Scripture, I want us to be asking how we wrestle with the issues of colonisation, of evangelism, of history - and how do we begin to take a different path or shape a different way?

What does it mean for us to be shapers of *God’s* kingdom here, today?

Call to Worship

From Psalm 48:

⁹ We ponder your steadfast love, O God,
in the midst of your temple.

¹⁰ Your name, O God, like your praise,
reaches to the ends of the earth.

Your right hand is filled with victory.

¹¹ Let Mount Zion be glad,
let the towns of Judah rejoice
because of your judgements.

¹² Walk about Zion, go all around it,
count its towers,

¹³ consider well its ramparts;
go through its citadels,
that you may tell the next generation

¹⁴ that this is God,
our God for ever and ever.

[God] will be our guide for ever.

We pray...
Gather us together in this place today, Holy Friend.
Hear our prayers,
receive our praise,
equip us with your word,
and then, as you sent out the Twelve,
send us out to share your message of hope, healing, and
redemption. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 4 July 2021, p.80

Prayer for Healing Country by Aunty Dr Doseena Fergie - *Common Grace*

For a video of this prayer featuring the artwork, 'Tree of Life' by Safina Stewart, go to:

[https://www.commongrace.org.au/healingcountry_prayer?
utm_campaign=prayer_for_healing_country&utm_medium=email&utm_source=commongrace](https://www.commongrace.org.au/healingcountry_prayer?utm_campaign=prayer_for_healing_country&utm_medium=email&utm_source=commongrace)

God of Mercy and Grace –

in your quest to bring about justice. You understand what it is like to persevere in an unjust society when you suffered and died on the Cross Have mercy on us.

This Land weeps in sorrow. It is filled with sadness and grief because of the atrocities of the past and present. Have mercy on us.

We yearn for conciliation and peace in this place. To yarn and listen deeply to each other with Care and Compassion.

God of Truth –

You are pure and true – we worship you for who you are. There is no one like you – for you shine in the darkness.

Enable all the peoples of this Country to desire, listen and understand the True History of this Land. For only then can we walk this journey together.

Jesus, you are the tree life. Help us to be your instruments of Truth, by the Power of your Holy Spirit.

We pray for discernment and wisdom to impart your Truth.

Deliver us from devastation and bring about Healing to Country and our communities.”

Our Healer –

May all Creation, the birds, animals, fish, trees, plants, rocks, mountains, waters, and peoples be healed to flourishing.

Strengthen us, lead us, inspire us into action, ignited by our faith in you Lord Jesus.

Help us not to lose Hope.

For it is only through justice, forgiveness and Love can there be Healing and Peace.

Amen.

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: 2 Samuel 5:1-10

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, 'Look, we are your bone and flesh. ²For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The Lord said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel.' ³So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel. ⁴David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for forty years. ⁵At Hebron he reigned over Judah for seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years.

⁶ The king and his men marched to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, 'You will not come in here, even the blind and the lame will turn you back'—thinking, 'David cannot come in here.' ⁷Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, which is now the city of David. ⁸David had said on that day, 'Whoever wishes to strike down the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack the lame and the blind, those whom David hates.' Therefore it is said, 'The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.' ⁹David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inwards. ¹⁰And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.

Reading: Mark 6:1-13

He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. ²On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, 'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offence at him. ⁴Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' ⁵And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.' ¹²So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

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

Thanks be to God.

Reflection -

Let us pray...

Surprising and confounding God, illumine your word to us today. As we ponder its meaning for us and our work, let it come not as a familiar friend easily forgotten but as a new spring of water for parched souls. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 4 July 2021, p.78

When I speak about sharing God's love with the world, what is going through your mind?
When we talk about telling the good news of Jesus Christ, what are you thinking?
What does it mean for us to be about building God's kingdom?

The readings before us today invite us into these questions, and to evaluate a host of assumptions what go with the questions I have raised.

Let's look first at the passage from 2 Samuel.

In a few short verses, David takes the throne of both Judah and Israel, the kingdom is united once more and David is hailed as becoming "greater and greater, for [God] was with him" (2 Sam 5:10).

But look more closely and there are some troubling elements to this story; read through the eyes of our indigenous brothers and sisters, we need to give this some time and attention. Now it is not for me to speak for my Aboriginal brothers and sisters, we need to take the time to listen deeply for ourselves, but I am grateful for their wisdom and for helping me to pay attention and to understand some of this differently.

After Saul died, David had made his base at Hebron.

Even though he had been anointed by Samuel, only two of the twelve tribes had accepted him as their king. It took a little while longer for the others to agree, and when they do, it becomes a kind of tribal federation. Notice that the agreement is described in terms of "covenant", the same kind of relational agreement that God has with God's people.

But then about 7 years later, they take on the Jebusites who are the indigenous people of the land on which Jerusalem stands. There is no suggestion that they fell out, we simply have David and his army marching on the city and taking it for himself. And there is also this curious reference to the blind and the lame having no place in the city of David (2 Sam 5:8).

Is that OK?

Is that really what God told them to do?

This is where we need to note that the story is always written by the ones who prevail.

Often the story is told in ways that celebrate or justify the actions of the victors.

And we need to recognise that the story is often told in ways that sanitise events and reduce complexity.

So before us is the voice that prevailed, the theological voice that prevailed.

So, in this case, the voice of the indigenous peoples of the land is silent.

One indigenous commentator, Rev. Dr. Garry Worete Deverell, Trawlolway man, Anglican Priest, and Vice-Chancellor's Fellow in Indigenous Theologies at the University of Divinity, suggests that it is more than possible that the covenant David entered into with the leaders of the tribal groups, the federation, included more than the twelve tribes of Israel. There were other people groups living in the land, and if David wanted a peaceful kingdom, he would have had to work with them.

On the one hand, this is a story of David living into his divine calling.

But seen through the eyes of the people who lived in that land, it is also a story of dispossession and being silenced.

Do you see the parallels for us today?

As we, as I, understand the life to which Jesus calls us, I struggle to put these stories of conquer, dispossession and colonisation alongside the inclusive, generous, just love to which Jesus calls us.

And I wonder... the people of Jesus' time expected a Messiah that would overthrow the Roman Empire and return the Jewish people to the glory days of the Davidic kingdom. But Jesus challenges that understanding - he is not about a military victory of conquest that brings exclusion or death - but God's kingdom will grow like a mustard seed, or yeast; God's kingdom will have a place for everyone no matter their ability or gender or race or anything else that makes us different; God's kingdom will stretch to embrace life in all its fullness.

And Jesus would rather die than rule by force.

Rather than accepting these stories on face value, then, how might we listen for the nuance, for the voices who are not heard, for the people who are written out?

And when we sit silently in the stillness, when we listen closely to a wider story, what do we discover?

In David's time, the growth of God's kingdom was seen in terms of land holding and power over peoples. It was all about violent conquer and imposing upon people who were not considered part of the 12 Tribes.

When we think of spreading God's word, for centuries, we have also gone about it in ways that have been about imposing a cultural perspective on people who are not like us - missionaries for centuries were sent with the idea that they were called to "save the unGodly". We need only to look at the way the Aboriginal missions in this country were established and run with a view to teaching Aboriginal peoples how to live like we do, dress like we do, speak like we do, with little regard for the wisdom of the Elders acquired over living in harmony with the land over tens of thousands of years.

In 2009, the Uniting Church amended its Constitution by adding a preamble to recognise and give voice to the First Peoples of this land. It contains this statement:

The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways.

para.3 of the Preamble to the UCA Constitution

When we turn then to the story of Jesus returning to his home town, what do we discover?

He is back amongst his own people, the Hebrew people, and he is teaching in the synagogue, a place where he would have been many times. But now the people around him don't want to hear what he has to say and the gospel writer tells us Jesus' power to heal was limited (Mark 6:5).

There is a practical bitter-sweetness to this story - a painfulness in not being accepted by your own people and a chastening that can only come from friends and family who have known you forever and who seek to keep you grounded.

And then the gospel writer tells us that Jesus calls his disciples together and sends them into the surrounding towns and villages. This time, he sends them to their own people, their own communities. And this model of mission and evangelism is one based on relationships and the reliance on the hospitality of those they had come to share with. It is not about knocking on a door and telling people that God loves them and offering them a tract on how to be saved. It is

about relationships that are grounded in the offer and acceptance of hospitality, in being vulnerable.

It is in the sharing of hospitality that the call to repent can be shared. Again, not a metaphorical belt over the ears in telling someone they are a terrible sinner (“turn or burn”!), but the simple call to return to God’s way. Remember, these are people who know God as Yahweh, the God of their ancestors - the call to turn back to God is not all that radical to their ears.

And with the sharing of stories comes the offer of healing, and power over unclean spirits (6:7) and demons (6:13), a setting free of people bound by powers that held them captive.

[There is much more to say about unclean spirits and demons but that is for another day...]

The practical advice Jesus gives them is that if people don’t want to hear your story then don’t hang around. Don’t keep belting their ears with stuff they don’t want to hear, move on.

So with all that I want to leave you with some questions:

What happens to our understanding of the realm of God when we listen for wisdom in all peoples, particularly in the wisdom of our indigenous brothers and sisters?

What is the message we share?

Take some time to put into words, your understanding of the vision of the world as God intended it to be.

Who is someone you long to share the wisdom of Jesus with? Imagine yourself speaking to that person, spending time with that person, pray about it.

For creative reflection

Download a colouring sheet of the Tree of Life image - for children and adults:

<https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/commongrace/pages/4437/attachments/original/1624512325/>

[NAIDOC_Colouring_In_Tree_of_Life_Treaty_and_Truth_Telling_for_Healing_Country_%282%29.pdf?1624512325](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/commongrace/pages/4437/attachments/original/1624512325/NAIDOC_Colouring_In_Tree_of_Life_Treaty_and_Truth_Telling_for_Healing_Country_%282%29.pdf?1624512325)

UCA Assembly Covenant Action Plan

As we approach NAIDOC Week 2021, the Uniting Church Assembly has launched its first Covenant Action Plan. UCA President Dr Deidre Palmer and Interim National Chair of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) Pastor Mark Kickett jointly welcomed the plan and encouraged UCA members to think about how they can live out the covenant in their own local contexts.

“The ACAP rightly places First Peoples, through the UAICC, at the heart of who we are as the Uniting Church and calls us to deepening relationships as First Peoples and Second Peoples living in this ancient land,” said Dr Palmer.

<https://uniting.church/assembly-covenant-action-plan/>

Responding

Listen - There's a Spirit In The Air (Together in Song 414, Seasons of the Spirit 4)
The tune on the video (from Seasons) is a bit brighter than the one in TiS. The words of this song invite us to think about how we share the good news of God's love in the world.

There's a spirit in the air,
telling Christians everywhere
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living working in our world.

Lose your shyness find your tongue;
tell the world what God has done,
God in Christ has come to stay,
Live tomorrow's life today.

When believers break the bread,
when a hungry child is fed,
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living working in our world.

Still the Spirit gives us light,
seeing wrong and setting right;
God in Christ has come to stay,
Live tomorrow's life today.

When a stranger's not alone,
where the homeless find a home,
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living working in our world.

May the Spirit fill our praise,
guide our thoughts and change our ways;
God in Christ has come to stay,
Live tomorrow's life today.

There's a Spirit in the air,
calling people everywhere
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living working in our world.

*CCLI Song # 1447647
Brian Arthur Wren | William Patrick Rowan
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Prayer for Others

Gracious God,
you have given us a perfect model of leadership, not in the mighty kings of old, however exciting their stories must have been to tell and to hear,
but in Jesus,
the king who rode a donkey;
the master who washed his servants' feet;
the one who refused to fight his enemies, but tried the radical experiment of loving them instead.

God, you want this world to be as close as possible to the kingdom of heaven, and so we give thanks for those who enter high office for all the best of reasons - to help others, to establish justice and fairness - and we grieve for the pressures that so often make them compromise or give up altogether.

We give thanks for all that is good in our own land; and for all the freedoms we enjoy.
May our freedom never make us complacent;
may we never, as Christians, pretend that the murky world of politics is not our concern.

We give thanks for all who work for peace and unity in our world;
and we ask your blessing on all they do.

We pray for those whose lives have been, and still are being devastated by war: victorious or defeated, everyone loses when the fighting and killing begin.

We give thanks for those who not only preach a gospel of love, but who live by Christ's example, putting other people's needs above their own; valuing those whom others fail even to notice; refusing to return hatred for hatred, but steadfastly living by your law of love. And so we think today of people we know and love who are unable to be with us today - whether sick, exhausted, attending to others - hold each one in grace and love. We pray for people who have no home to call their own, and those who will go to bed hungry or cold or frightened. Strengthen us to offer ourselves in attending to their need.

We pray for the Church that bears Christ's name, but which so often lets him down. When we worry about declining numbers, remind us that weakness for you is strength. When we stress about what we should be doing, remind us that all you need us to do is to trust. When we look to those who seem to be successful, and want to be more like them, turn our eyes upon Jesus, and make us more like him.

So may your people become what we are called to be, [Christ's] living presence in the world, loving and serving in [Christ's] name until [your] kingdom comes. Amen.

Adapted from Spill The Beans, resources for 4 July 2021, p.60

Offering

In our attempt to follow Christ, we journey with so much more than a walking stick; we take money, bread, clothing, and other creature comforts we deem to be essential. But many of our neighbours lack these very things.

We take a moment to commit our lives and our resources to serving God in the world and to meeting the needs of people who are hungry, sick, exhausted, homeless...

Loving Christ, thank you for teaching us your healing ways, and for entrusting us with your message.

Thank you for your generosity of bread and clothing and money of which you spoke so long ago. These are items we cannot imagine travelling without, and basics that many people struggle to attain. Receive our offering today; may it be used to ease the suffering of those you love here in our community and beyond. May our praise extend to the far corners of Earth. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 4 July 2021, p.82

Sending out

Sending

Strap on your sandals and hit the road, my friends.

Shake off the dust of your complacency.

Walk with a friend and travel light.

Go, proclaiming Christ's message of healing and hope.

Go, declaring that hearts and lives can change!

Keep going, because Christ gives you authority.

Go in the name of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Just go.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 4 July 2021, p.82

Blessing

And the blessing of God - Creator, Saviour and Sustainer - is with you always. Amen.