

### *Acknowledgement of Country*

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather, acknowledge, lament and pray today.

They are stewards on behalf of The Almighty Creator. We would also like to pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future.

I went to the 'Change the Heart' service at Warwick Stadium on Tuesday evening; around twenty of these ecumenical services were held all around Australia over the past week or so. Some years ago an Aboriginal Christian leader named Aunty Jean Phillips asked people to pray for First Nations people who found the celebration of Australia Day on January 26<sup>th</sup> difficult, and from there a national response began, in partnership with Common Grace.

Common Grace is an organisation of Christians from different traditions who are passionate about Jesus and justice. This is what their website says about January 26<sup>th</sup>:

"When we acknowledge something, we accept its truth and existence and recognise that it is of importance or significance. Acknowledgment is an act of noticing something and honouring it with our attention.

Jesus regularly acknowledged others, turning his gaze towards them and giving them his full attention. He acknowledged the presence of those who his society deemed unworthy and those who lived in ways that made others feel awkward. He acknowledged when people acted with kindness and faith, even if these acts were outside the social norms.

And in particular, he acknowledged those who had experienced pain and oppression, extending compassion and love.

As a Common Grace community that longs to live in ways that are 'more like Jesus', this year we are approaching January 26<sup>th</sup> determined to acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were our First Nations Peoples. We commit to acknowledging them privately, in our prayers and as we seek to grow in understanding, and publicly, by standing alongside them, remembering our past, and finding a way forward together."

Those of us who studied 'A Voice in the Wilderness: Listening to the Statement from the Heart' last year discovered things about Australia's colonial history that were unsettling, disturbing, confronting, and often upsetting. But we also found hope, because in our greater understanding of the truth in our past lies a better appreciation of the issues facing First Nations Peoples today.

Whatever our own thoughts and feelings about Australia Day and the move to change the date, we need to acknowledge that this country is not always the lucky country we'd like to believe it is, not everyone gets a 'fair go', and racism and prejudice are alive and well.

I believe we can do better; I love this country, the land and people, and we can do better. We can change our hearts.

When we read the Hebrew Bible we will quickly find many stories of violence and hatred towards 'foreigners'. When we get to New Testament times things weren't much better; the people of Israel were no longer invading and conquering other people's lands because they themselves had been invaded and conquered by the Romans.

We might think that being occupied and having a common enemy might bring people together, but within Israel there were prejudices, rivalries and infighting.

In the time of Jesus, the people of Jerusalem- the southerners- saw themselves as better educated, religiously more orthodox and ethnically purer than the common herd living up north around Galilee. It was called 'Galilee of the Gentiles' as an insult, meaning foreigners had intermarried and diluted the Jewish-ness of the people. Later in Jesus' life, the religious authorities will refuse to believe that any prophet could come from Galilee.

Snobbery and prejudice are, of course, not new. It is in keeping with Jesus' character that he would choose to conduct his ministry around Galilee, where the 'common' people lived and worked. He called his disciples from among the ordinary people he met as they went about their business.

The first to be called were Andrew and Simon, and then James and John, also fishermen. They responded immediately and left their boats and their nets- James and John even left their dad- and joined Jesus.

Why did they drop everything, including their jobs, homes and families, to follow Jesus? He didn't offer them an income or even a roof over their heads, so what on earth persuaded them to do such a thing? Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in him." Something about Jesus called to their restless hearts, and when they heard his voice they obeyed.

Jesus still calls us today, and his call is to radical obedience and absolute discipleship: to give all we have for something worth infinitely more.

Discerning God's call can be difficult, when so many voices try to drown it out. When we make decisions about what we do, the things we buy, our attitudes to people, we need to ask ourselves: is this what Jesus might do? Is this consistent with what I know about God's love and the way God wants me to live?

When Jesus called the fishers, he did not ask any questions and simply said, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." No qualifications or prior experience are required for those called to follow Jesus.

Perhaps the only pre-requisite is a restless heart; a heart that knows there must be more to life than material goods, wealth or success; a heart that longs for peace in the world, for people to live side by side, caring for one another; a heart that grieves about the violence inflicted by people on others and on the land; a heart that yearns for the hope and joy and beauty God intended at creation.

Where is God calling us, the followers of Jesus in this parish? Where would Jesus be, if he came to live here? I suspect he'd be down at the pub, having a beer with the hard-drinkers and talking to the families having dinner. I suspect he'd go to the park, or wherever the teenagers hang out late at night.

I think Jesus might not hang around the places where people are doing just fine; I think he'd go looking for people queuing up at Centrelink, or at the methadone clinic. We might find him sitting in the park near Royal Perth with the indigenous people from the country whose relatives are in hospital.

I suspect that when some of us sneer at those we write off as bogans, losers, or bludgers, Jesus would be hurt- because he loves bogans, just as he loves drug-addicts, alcoholics, homeless people, refugees and all the human beings society would rather ignore.

Where is God calling us? The answer for each of us may be different, but we are all called to be more like the One we follow.

Let us all pray that God will change our hearts in all the places that need to be changed.

The Lord be with you.