

Australia Day: challenges to a free and open society

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25 January 2004, Epiphany 3

Nehemiah 8: 1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31; Luke 4: 14-21

Our Prime Minister has sparked debate this week by suggesting that some public (i.e. state) schools are too politically correct. am wondering what he means by politically correct. Does he meant that they:

- question policies about immigration and detention centres;
- are opposed to our involvement in the war in Iraq;
- and therefore the change in the relationship with the British Royal family
- are more open to negotiations regarding Aboriginal land and sovereignty
- are more accepting of the diversity of Australian society
- and are concerned about the future of Medicare

I wonder?

Having had our children attend public schools, Catholic and Anglican schools, I would have to say that sort of political correctness is evident in both school systems.

As we worship this Australia Day weekend, I hope we might give thanks for the diversity in Australia and the freedom to express that diversity.

I hope we might be thankful for our diverse cultural heritage and our growing appreciation of the aboriginal culture which is being revived.- John Rudder is teaching Wiradjuri language ...

Germaine Greer said Australia is boring and has decided to return to England. I don't find Australia boring after all, I've got a whole congregation to keep me on my toes! People raising families, enjoying life, illness and grief...

I listen to the "What's On" program on ABC666 and my head spins with the events, free and otherwise, available for me (?) tonight's concert (at Parliament House)

I come to church and I meet my fellow Australians and people from all over the world: Norway, Kenya, Germany, USA ...

I give thanks that I can go swimming at the Dickson pool.

In the midst of all this I need to remember, we need to remember that we are called into fellowship with God in a special way... and today come to together to rethink and reflect on that call.

In our first reading, the prophet called the people together before the Water Gate (no relation to the hotel or the scandal which brought down US President Nixon) when they had been resettled in a rebuilt Jerusalem somewhere between 464 and 423 BCE.

It was a time of re focussing on who they were and what their purpose was. And so Ezra reads from the book of the Law.

We are not sure exactly what Law, but we can see the parallel between this and Jesus reading the prophecy of Isaiah 61 in the synagogue. (the gospel)

The passage (Fuller says) offers a model of synagogue worship.

- The reading of the Torah (Law)
- with the people standing
- The "giving of a sense" of it the sermon, so that the people understand clearly

- finally, the response of worship

The same order would have been experienced in the synagogue when Jesus spoke at Nazareth and survives in our Liturgy of the Word including our standing for the gospel //because it is our Law// and in its reading Jesus stands among us to deliver his Word.

So like Ezra all those years ago, and like Jesus in the synagogue

we are called to rethink and remember our calling as God's people.

(Luke:) Jesus makes the point that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him to fulfil this task as the Servant of God.

- good news to the poor
- release to the captives
- sight to the blind
- freedom for the oppressed.

Luke wants us to understand that the **whole** of Jesus ministry is inspired by the Spirit and the way Luke tells this story, Jesus lays his cards on the table

- in the synagogue
- in his hometown
- and interprets his role as the Servant of God depicted in the writings of Isaiah.

All this then, is as Jesus says, the fulfilment of scriptures and points to the new age of God's rule. It is the fulfilment of the old era and the beginning of the new.

And this week, in this Epiphany season, Jesus is made known/made manifest to the world as the true Servant of God, proclaiming God's favour towards humanity. As we read Paul's letter to the Corinthians we find the body used as a model for the church.

- diverse parts
- interconnected as part of the whole
- dependent on each other

In Paul's church there was also an order and structure

1. apostles
2. prophets
3. teachers

with other charismatic/spirit inspired ministries but all, like Jesus, baptized in the one Spirit, all made to drink of the one Spirit.

We as the body of believer/Christians in our diversity need to know that we share with Christ the awareness that The Spirit of the Lord is upon us.

That we share in that Servant Nature.

As we celebrate Australia Day, we need to be THANKFUL and CONSTANTLY AWARE of the challenges to a free and open society which will

- care for the poor
- educate its young
- and be generous to those who were here before us.

We remember too that in the midst of all this we say with Christ: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.