

St Philips Anglican Church, O'Connor

*Sharing in Common Grace*

Revd Martin Johnson

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost 2022—Year C

*Deuteronomy 30:9-14. Luke 10:25-37.*

Paul tells us in Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. This is the Kingdom not the world we currently live in, we are still striving to make this a reality for us. Hence the importance of NAIDOC week which concludes today. As the Website reminds us: it is a week to celebrate and recognise the history, culture, and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. An opportunity for all Australians to learn about First Nations cultures and histories and participate in celebrations of the oldest, continuous living culture on earth.

For us here in Australia reconciliation with our indigenous people remains perhaps the most important priority. All the other goals that we aspire to, environmental protection, a more equitable economy, high quality healthcare and education for all, will come to nothing unless we respond to this fundamental issue. We clearly need a reset, a reassessment of the goal of reconciliation. I fear a more strident reaction from younger folk towards this issue; frustration with inaction can so easily spill over into violent protest, we have seen that in the US and other places. This will setback the work of reconciliation.

During the week I watched a reflection from Common Grace on the Good Samaritan story. Common Grace is a movement of people pursuing Jesus and justice - this is the banner on their website. The reflection was led by Brooke Prentice a leading light in the Common Grace movement. In her reflection she spoke of the way that Indigenous peoples had been left by the roadside and ignored. She particularly singled out the treatment of her people by Christian leaders who have metaphorically crossed the road, a matter which of course pricks my conscience. But few of us in the major urban areas of Australia have any idea of the plight of our indigenous brothers and sisters, it rarely makes the news. In the recent General Election mainstream Australia has said there are other issues, the cost of living, the pandemic, climate change to name but three; and, yes, it is true they are important issues for all of us irrespective of race, colour or creed. But these issues and many others will continue to be problematic while we continue to live without reconciliation.

Brooke's reflection followed the classic model of interpretation in regards the parable of the Good Samaritan. An indigenous person – a representative of a people, has been mugged and done over and folk have crossed to the other side of the road, they have in effect ignored the plight of a whole race of people. This is the way we usually view this parable. The man on the roadside is, more often than not, someone who is marginalised, homeless perhaps, the victim of domestic violence or addiction, a sufferer of poor mental health or just plain different, etc., etc.

Let's look again. Jesus was talking to a group of Jewish people, clearly a lawyer was in their midst. He says all the right things about the law, ticks the boxes. Yes, says Jesus, you have spoken correctly. But he is clearly a smart Alec and says to Jesus and who then is my neighbour? Hence the parable. But the victim here is one of their own, he is not invisible or unseen, the priest and Levite are very much aware of his presence, but they have bigger fish to fry. They both have religious duties to fulfil, they can't be mucking about with blood and potentially a dead body! It is a member of a marginalised minority that offers help, that shows the way, that reveals the essence of neighbourliness.

So let's apply this to our situation. It is one of us that has become a victim, a member of the parish or wider community perhaps, someone worth mugging for their credit card or their mobile phone. But we are far too busy to help we have more pressing matters, important things to attend to (heavens, I have a parish to run!) and we pass by. It is a member of a different race and culture that comes to help, an indigenous person shows the way.

This is the call of indigenous leaders, they are saying we have much to offer; our cultures and languages and survived for countless millennia, we have been a part of this landscape from time immemorial. Please don't simply intervene, create new projects or policies, perpetuate the paternalism that has brought us to this point - listen to us. This is the call of the statement for the heart which we shall ponder during these coming weeks.

Jesus' response to the lawyer was a call to get back to basics – to the law. Acknowledge all those in need as your neighbour, acknowledge that even those seen as most unlikely have something to offer. The Deuteronomist says much the same, today he might say - it's not rocket science, simply look around you! Look around you and draw upon the wisdom and knowledge that reconciled neighbours can share, that together they might overcome the issues that beset us, whatever they might be.

The Common Grace movement is a call to the same simplicity. 'We believe in the beauty of listening to one another across race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age boundaries,' says their web site. 'We long to see Christians in these lands now called Australia uniting for the common good, finding common ground and sharing in common grace.'

I have no doubt that many would say this is completely unrealistic, naïve, dangerous even. But Jesus doesn't guarantee safety; the man left for dead might well have just have enough strength to tell the Samaritan exactly what he thinks about him, or worse, they are after all avowed enemies. Jesus calls us to be open to those with whom we share our neighbourhood to take the risk of reaching out or riskier still be prepared to be reached out to; he is even telling us that it is not an option, but the way to life in its fullest. What must I do to inherit eternal life? Now we know. Amen.