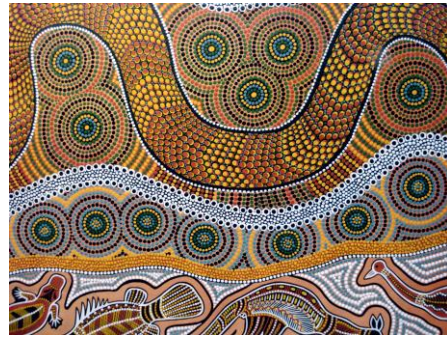


Sermon – Aboriginal Sunday

Scripture: Deuteronomy 32:7

Jeremiah 22:15



Listening to the Voices of the Past.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attendees are advised that the following service may contain images, names and quotes of people who have died.

We start our Aboriginal Sunday Service with an Acknowledgement of Country. Common Grace have provided a beautiful Acknowledgement of Country that was part of the 2022 “Change the Heart” service which features Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. You will travel over several Aboriginal nations as we acknowledge the over 300 nations of Aboriginal peoples across these lands.

Video from Aboriginal Youth.

William Cooper was 78 years of age in 1938 and just 3 years before his death, 150 years after the arrival of the First Fleet, he wrote a letter to the Churches. William Cooper was a Yorta Yorta man, Pastor, Advocate, Campaigner and Hero.

In his letter he called upon all Christian denominations to set aside the Sunday before January 26th as Aborigines Day, what we now refer to as Aboriginal Sunday.

It was a day set aside for prayer and reflection for Aboriginal people, and as an acknowledgment and protest of what was lost by the arrival of the Europeans.

William Cooper continually advocated for justice for all. In 1938, he led the only protest, anywhere in the world against Hitler's brutality and treatment of European Jews in Nazi Germany.

William and 12 others marched to the German consulate in South Melbourne and in 2010, this action was formally acknowledged with an education memorial, established in Cooper's honour at a Jerusalem Museum.

Yorta Yorta Man. Governor. Pastor. Professional Athlete.

**Advocate and Defender of Rights, Sir Pastor Douglas Nicholls
1906-1988**

Sir Douglas Nichols, the grandnephew of William Cooper took up the baton to continue tackling disadvantage within the community – leading him to be seen as a father figure. Sir Doug was a professional athlete, winning great feats in boxing, athletics and football, even winning a premiership with Northcote. He became a pastor at the age of 30. Our family was fortunate to have involvement with Sir Douglas as our dad worked alongside him in the sporting field.

Sir Doug participated in the 1938 day of mourning protests; he was instrumental in the 1967 referendum; was highly decorated receiving an OBE, and MBE and a Knighthood. He was also the only First Nations Person to be made a Governor – the Governor of South Australia.

Scripture readings: Leah

So why these two short scripture passages?

In Deuteronomy, Moses, on the cusp of Israel entering the promised land, is teaching the Israelites a song. In the lyrics of the song, he is imploring the people not to forget what their elders knew and experienced. To hold the truth of the generations that have come before, close to their heart – lest they forget and find themselves turning away from God.

Jeremiah is seeking to remind the people – to remind King Shallum of the acts of his father, pleading that he should have headed this prominent voice from his past. While Shallum exploited his subjects for personal gain, wealth, and privilege – his father pursued righteousness and justice, he defended the cause of the poor and needy – he truly knew what it meant to know the Lord.

These readings are reminders to us of the way the wisdom of our forebears can shape us, to be all that God has created and called us to be. The Bible calls all followers of God to remember and learn from the generations of the past. In fact, the word “remember” appears in the bible 240 times. It is in this memory that God’s people remember God’s faithfulness, character, promises and all that God has done.

Jeremiah’s reminder to us, is that if we are to truly know God – then we too should be people that rather than seek these idols, should instead pursue the cause of the needy and seek justice

These readings are specific examples of a timely reminder for us. Australia is a nation of opulence and privilege, as well as injustice and poverty. Wealth and power continue to shape the ambitions of many of us.

How often do we turn away from what happened in the past – giving it little attention and dismissing it?

How often do we fail to learn and heed the wisdom of our elders and thus fail to progress in the direction they were pointing us? How often do we fail to examine our past actions and our history honestly and wholeheartedly, and in doing so fail to shape a better us and a better tomorrow?

Sir Doug Nichols was instrumental in Australia's most successful ever referendum – where Australia removed negative discrimination in its constitution towards Aboriginal people and ensured they were counted amongst the population.

On this Aboriginal Sunday, let us listen to our elders.

Let us fully engage with the truth of our history, and in doing so, take steps towards the reconciliation that elders like William Cooper, Sir Doug Nicholls and Aunty Pearl Gibbs called the nation to.

A nation where all peoples and all creation flourishes.

We can take big steps to continue to push towards reconciliation and flourishing. One of the clearest, as called for by the Uluru Statement, is to enshrine a First Nations Voice in the Constitution. If we do this, it will be another moment of celebration and progress for our nation.

A moment where we can come together and show that we are listening to the hearts of our First Nations Peoples and their forebears.

In 2023, Australia has a once in a generation opportunity to take a significant step forward in justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. With the referendum for a constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice to Parliament on the table, **we face a significant moment as a country to listen deeply to the calls for justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.**

A Voice to Parliament is an important step towards realising the long-standing calls to deeply listen to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the need to establish treaties, and the importance of national truth-telling. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been seeking to be heard since 1788. Too often Australia has failed to listen.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are incarcerated at higher rates than any other people group on the planet. Children as young as 10 from First Nations are placed in prison.

Over 500 Aboriginal people have died in custody since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody released their report in 1991, with 339 recommendations.

We grieve the lack of implementation of recommendations by the Australian Government and the compounded grief that First Nations peoples continue to experience.

We are committed to partnering with God to see the flourishing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities:

- To see a society, and a justice system that pursues true justice – where all people are supported, valued, and empowered.
- Where structural racism is a thing of the past.
- Where all people are given opportunities to flourish, rather than languishing in prison.
- And where children as young as 10 receive love and care rather than incarceration. Please join us in vision, prayer and action.

‘Reconciliation as Love in Action’ Prayer

Written by Tahlia Smith, Gureng Gureng and South Sea Islander Woman

Creator God,

First and foremost, we acknowledge and declare Your Sovereignty. We come before You with thanks and praise for who You are; steadfast, mighty to save, true, merciful, and above all, You *are* Love.

Jesus, You are our focus and the centre of everything we do.

Thank You for being our greatest example of what 'Reconciliation as Love in Action' looks like, through the finished work of the Cross.

Justice is part of Your very nature and so we reconcile ourselves with You first so that we can reconcile with others. We put our trust in You afresh, and in all our ways acknowledge You for who You are.

Holy Spirit, we call upon You as we continue our journey of being led by our Aboriginal Christian Leaders, we're pursuing friendship and reconciliation in our lifetime.

Comfort us in times of hardship and heartache. When conversations with loved ones around Reconciliation become difficult, speak to us to remind us You're with us and You are love.

Cover us and counsel us when decisions seem overwhelming when we're unsure of the next step to take. Make Your presence known to us Your children as the Prince of Peace.

Continue to guide us as the Good Shepherd, as we continue to seek Your face and not just Your hand.

When the things of Earth are unjust, we exalt You Lord and ask for Heaven and Earth to collide. May Justice roll down and the High King of Heaven have His way among us.

We acknowledge our incessant need for a Saviour, and so we come to You Jesus. We know You are in the business of Reconciliation. True and whole Reconciliation; mind, body and spirit.

For Yours is the Kingdom, the power, and in advance, we give You all the glory. We love You Lord and pray this in Your Name, Amen.