

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH

LENT 5

21ST March



Behold the lamb of God,
who takes away the sin of the world ...

WORSHIP IN A TIME OF CORONA-VIRUS

As we continue through Lent, we continue to reflect in a spirit of penitence on the relationship between First and Second Australians. Much needs healing for our First peoples. But much also needs healing in we whose families came later and who have prospered at the expense of the original inhabitants of this continent.

Wiradjuri man and journalist, Stan Grant, says the great Australian dream was built on the backs of the aboriginal people. In a 2016 speech Stan said: *The Australian Dream is rooted in racism. It is the very foundation of the dream. It is there at the birth of the nation. It is there in terra nullius. An empty land. A land for the taking.*

It is as though we have become *terra amnesia*, refusing to acknowledge and remember what has taken place. But things are moving and for this we can thank the spirit of God who is moving us all toward healing and reconciliation.

This week marked the National Close the Gap Day. The lack of Closing the Gap is an ongoing injustice. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to die too young and too often from this injustice, and through these gaps we realise the inequality in these lands now called Australia. May we all grieve the lives lost far too young through child, youth and adult suicide, life expectancy gaps and prison incarceration, and may we take individual and collective action to see justice roll down.

Have regard for your covenant, O Lord
for the dark places of the land are full of the haunts of violence.
Do not let the downtrodden be put to shame;
let the poor and needy praise your name.
Rise up, O God, plead your cause;

Psalm 74. 20-22

Prayer

Creator of all things,
Both seen and unseen,
Speak to us in your great wisdom.

Make us strong as we seek your help and guidance.
Teach us to love all people,
Regardless of race or colour or belief.

May we listen with great care
To the heartbeat of this land
And to its people,
Who cared for it so well
And for so long.

May the peace these people and their land
Have always enjoyed
Continue to be strengthened and preserved
By all who wish to come to be part of
This country and its ancient dreaming.

We pray in the name of your embodied wisdom,
Jesus the Christ, **Amen**

Jeremiah 31. 31-34

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Psalms 119. 9-16

How can young people keep their way pure?

By guarding it according to your word.

With my whole heart I seek you;

do not let me stray from your commandments.

I treasure your word in my heart,

so that I may not sin against you.

Blessed are you, O Lord;

teach me your statutes.

With my lips I declare

all the ordinances of your mouth.

I delight in the way of your decrees

as much as in all riches.

I will meditate on your precepts,

and fix my eyes on your ways.

I will delight in your statutes;

I will not forget your word

The Gospel of John 12. 20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’ Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into

the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

‘Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—“Father, save me from this hour”? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him.’ Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Reflecting

I have a friend who has a house in North Fitzroy. This house has two street frontages, one at the front, the other at the rear of the block. For many years now he has been working towards constructing a second, two-story residence on the site in which he would live, then selling the other house. But progress has been very slow as neighbours have all along the way objected to every detail of the proposed project, delaying its fruition by years. My friend has a determination which I have always admired; his neighbours are also determined.

The latest diversion has been over the title boundary. At the back of my friend’s block there has been a small brick building on the boundary line. At some point in time a former neighbour constructed a lean-to carport which was attached to the brick wall on my friend’s boundary. But a recent land survey has revealed that the brick wall on my friend’s block is actually 50mm inside the actual boundary line as it is recorded on the title. His neighbour wants to claim vacant possession of the 50mm sliver of land. If this was successful it would mean a change to all of my friend’s very detailed and precise designs for his project, frustrating the project’s realisation further. All over 50mm.

As we have acknowledged the Boon Wurrung people and their custodianship of the land on which the Ormond church stands over the course of Lent, the silliness of this argument over a 50mm sliver of land has come into stark relief for me. I have realised how tightly developed and controlled our Australian notion of land ownership is.

The Great Australian Dream has been the quarter acre block. Our lives have been oriented



toward acquiring such a piece of land – and more if we were successful – and building a life on it: marriage, children, happy family, prosperity, success and wealth. We stake our claim and sign on the dotted line. The Great Australian Dream. But, as Stan Grant says, the Great Australian Dream has been built upon the backs of the aboriginal people of Australia.

Strange, I thought, how the British created a legal fiction they called *terra nullius*, that there were no people in Australia – the indigenous inhabitants being classed as fauna, not humans - and so no one owned it, and on this vacated land we created a great legal superstructure around land ownership. The truth is our identity as Australians is so intricately and intimately tied up with property ownership.

So, when the notion of *terra nullius* was challenged and found wanting in the Mabo Case in the High Court of Australia in 1992, everyone thought that the aboriginal people were going to be coming after the quarter acre block. Why would they want my quarter-acre block, no one seemed to ask? With our identity tied up with our paling-fenced parcels of suburbia we couldn't imagine that what was being sought was recognition of some other relationship to land which indigenous people have had and still have. The impediment to comprehending this relationship to country is ours – not theirs. We are the retarded ones with our identities and imaginations not able to see beyond the six-foot fence.

It strikes me that there is a darkness to our notion of land ownership. Because it is built on the fact of stolen land. With our identities tied up with land ownership it is difficult for us to acknowledge our own complicity in the theft – all this time later. It is as though the legal superstructure around ownership is some kind of smokescreen to divert us from what has taken place. With the stroke of a pen, thousands of years of indigenous 'ownership' was wiped away by the British legal system and it is as though the ubiquitousness of the quarter acre block has sought to make us all complicit in the theft. This is a collective darkness. Behind our Australian dream, a nightmare for indigenous people.

We have read some words of Jesus which John has woven into a scene as Jesus begins to move toward the cross: *Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

We are reminded that the call to know the life of God means loss and death of those things which so often are considered to be necessary, indispensable, measures of success and identity which our culture places on us. But in Christ we are called to this path of dying in order to bear much fruit. This is not bodily death, rather death to those things which hold us in thrall and strangle our god-giveness; and those things in our living which deny life to others.

As we reflect on what will give life to our indigenous brothers and sisters, we have to recognise that so much of what we have taken to ourselves as essential or told ourselves a story about being lucky or blessed has actually robbed them of so much. A spirit of penitence is a spirit which is open to what is wrong and needs to be righted. It is not a spirit of judgement and condemnation but a spirit which recognises that there are things which need to be righted and reconciled. The spirit which fears the quarter-acre block being taken away is a spirit of fear, not love.

Dr Maleika Selwyn offers us a prayer which seeks God's spirit:

Teach us how to love each other and journey together,
in this process of reconciliation and true friendship.

As we explore how Ormond UC may participate in this reconciliation may God give us hearts are open and transformed by God's resurrection, that Christ may still be seen and felt and heard.

Prayer – prepared by David Baxter.

We pray for these times in which we live, so much confusion, so much anxiety as people try to make sense of things that are happening around them and in their lives.

Help us to listen to one another to share the truth and value each other's contribution.

We pray for the church as a valuable contributor to the needs of many different communities, bringing a message of hope, where hope has been lost, speaking a word of truth into situations and communities who have lost their way.

We pray for the Uniting Church, wherever it is found, that its members will continue to work in the local and wider community to support those in need offering the comfort that facilitates healing, the encouragement that creates new beginnings, the guidance that supports progress when the way forward is unclear.

We pray for those places across the world where violence is treated as an acceptable way of life in achieving ambitions. In particular today we remember, Ethiopia, Yemen, Somalia .

We pray for those who are bewildered by life, unable to plan effectively, bringing all sorts of problems on themselves and on those who offer love and support to them.

We pray that the time will come where peace will be valued as much as is power. Giving will be valued as much as taking. Sharing will be valued as a positive way of life.

Amen

Closing the Gap prayer

Dear Lord,

We thank you for this land of Australia.

We thank you for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters who you placed as the original custodians and stewards of this precious land.

We pray that as we begin to acknowledge the truth of past hurt it is the start of a deep healing in our nation.

We pray that the gap in health outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Non-Indigenous Australians will be closed.

We pray for all health professionals - doctors, nurses, carers, dentists, administration staff in health facilities –

may these health professionals be filled with compassion, understanding, and love as they see their frontline role in helping to Close the Gap.

We pray Australia will Close The Gap!

We pray for greater cultural understanding and improved access to health services.
Show us how we can each, individually, be a part of making this a reality.
Teach us how to love each other and journey together
in this process of reconciliation and true friendship.

We pray for those that feel hopeless that they will find their hope in You.
We pray especially for the families and communities of the 35 Aboriginal people who have
committed suicide this year alone (2019) and we lament this figure is added to weekly.
We pray that you fill the families and communities
each with a peace that surpasses all human understanding;
that they will know that they are not alone in their grief,
that You walk beside them and there is a community around them that loves, supports and cares
for them.

We thank you for each of our Aboriginal Elders
who have journeyed with their communities through much sickness, hardship, and grief.
Fill them afresh with your strength and wisdom and courage.
As we pray for these Stolen Lives,
we pray that we may be the agents of your healing, in Jesus name. Amen

Dr Maleika Selwyn – 2019

Blessing

For you, deep stillness of the silent inland
For you, deep blue of the desert skies
For you, flame red of the rocks and stones
For you, sweet water from hidden springs.

From the edges seek the heartlands
and when you're burnt by the journey
may the cool winds of the hovering
Spirit soothe and replenish you.

In the name of Christ, In the name of Christ.

Julie Perrin

Closing the Gap prayer written for Common Grace's [2019 National Reconciliation Week campaign](#). Dr Maleika Selwyn is a GP who is passionate about working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. She lives and works in NSW on the land of the Dharuk and Wiradjuri nations.

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NEWS AND NOTICES

SUNDAY EVENING WALKS DURING LENT

As part of our Lenten observance this year you are invited to take part in a meditative walk each Sunday evening over the six weeks. We gather at Allnutt Park on Wheatley Road at 6pm and are given a provocation and question to reflect on as we walk. We will gather at the Wright Street Rotunda near the centre of the park. Enquiries to: Ron Townsend.

PALM SUNDAY - WALK FOR REFUGEES

Walk for Justice for Refugees on Palm Sunday (28th March) is an important opportunity to raise awareness of the continuing injustice and cruelty experienced by refugees and people who are seeking asylum. This year Palm Sunday actions are calling for:

- Provide Permanent Protection
- Provide Family Reunion
- Provide Safety Net Support in the community (access to Jobseeker)
- End Mandatory Detention
- End Offshore – bring the refugees here or take up the NZ offer to resettlement offer

When: Sunday 28 March, 1:30 PM (AEST)

Where: State Library of Victoria, 328 Swanson Street, Melbourne

Speakers include:

- Julian Burnside AO, QC - long standing Refugee advocate and civil liberties lawyer
- Mostafa Azimbitar (Moz from Manus) - freed Medevac refugee
- Faith Communities Council of Victoria representatives
- Sr Brigid Arthur - Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project
- Rally Chairs: Michele O'Neil - President Australian Council of Trade Unions & Ahmad Hakim - Refugee Voices

On Palm Sunday people from cities and towns around Australia will be holding rallies and vigils to call for Justice and a Fair Go for Refugees.

You can support justice for refugees by attending on the day and joining and sharing this event on social media.

This event will be COVIDsafe, please wear a mask, and register with our QR codes on the day.

ROSTER FILL-INS

We are seeking anyone interested to assist with Counting Duties on the following weeks of Worship, due to the availability of some members now limited.

Weeks that fill-ins are required are:

28 March, 16 May, 1 August, 5 Sept

If available to help please contact the office with your availability on this email

office@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au

SUNDAY LUNCH

Next Sunday, 28th March, some of the more senior ladies will resume their monthly lunch at The Bentleigh Club in Yawla Street at around noon. It is a reasonably priced meal in pleasant surroundings and a way of catching up. There will be lots to talk about.

Please speak to Pam if you would like to join in.

ROSTER for Sunday 28 March 2021

READING	Karen Roberts	
PRAYERS	Heather Baxter	
EARLY WORD	Ron Townsend	
DOOR DUTY	David Northwood	Elizabeth Northwood
SOUND	Graeme Davonport	
COUNTING	Jan Davenport	TBA
MUSIC	Peter Hurley	
RESOURCES DELIVERY (Fri 26 Mar)	Heather Baxter	

Are you interested in exploring Aboriginal issues?

Here are some ideas:

Movies:

1. "In My Blood it Runs". – movie ABC iView

Confronting movie about a small lad's life as an indigenous boy. . Definitely worth viewing.

2. "Samson and Delilah" – movie (Google Play)

Two teenagers find love and look for a place where they can be together in peace in this comedy drama from Australia.

3. "First Australians" – series SBS On Demand

An opportunity to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice issues and the true history of this land now called Australia.

Read/Borrow (Heather and David have a copy of these):

1. "Dark Emu" – Bruce Pascoe

2. "Young Dark Emu" – Bruce Pascoe

3. "Finding our Heart" – Thomas Mayor

Act:

To stop Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Resources and template letter –

https://www.commongrace.org.au/key_event_resources

Pray:

Collated prayers and blessings written by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christians as well as prayers for First Nations Peoples written by non-indigenous Christians –

https://www.commongrace.org.au/aboriginal_prayer_resources