

Reconciliation Week

4 June 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Video by Bianca Manning from Common Grace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVtnT-8BPkA>

BIBLE READINGS

Psalm 8 (responsively)

Lord, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory

in the heavens.

When I consider your heavens,

the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars,

which you have set in place,

what is humanity that you are mindful of them,

human beings that you care for them?

You have made them a little lower than the angels

and crowned them with glory and honour.

You made them rulers over the works of your hands;

you put everything under their feet:

all flocks and herds,

and the animals of the wild,

the birds in the sky,

and the fish in the sea,

all that swim the paths of the seas.

Lord, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Ephesians 2:11-18

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision', remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Matthew 28:16-20

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

MESSAGE

Reconciliation involves bringing two estranged parties together to address and hopefully resolve hurtful issues that have separated them. And it's often hard work – just ask brothers William and Harry Windsor!



Reconciliation can take many forms and a positive outcome is never guaranteed, whether in a family, a marriage, in a workplace or in relationships between indigenous people and Second Nations people.

A couple of recent high profile examples show how difficult the process of reconciliation can be.

At last year's Federal election, a number of so-called Teal candidates were successful in defeating long standing MPs. In one closely fought contest, Teal



candidate Monique Ryan defeated then Treasurer Josh Frydenberg in the seat of Kooyong. Ryan employed Sally Rugg as her Chief of Staff, who had previously been a key Get-Up activist.

Ryan and Rugg had a big falling out over working conditions with Rugg contending that her working hours were unreasonable and

taking her case to the Fair Work Commission, while Ryan argued that expectations were well understood when Rugg took on the role and were covered by generous overtime provisions.

The highly public falling-out went to mediation and to the Federal Court before a financial settlement was reached earlier in May. Reconciliation was not achieved, with neither party admitting fault. Rugg no longer works for Ryan. This case is one of several recent cases that suggest that Parliament House is a fairly toxic workplace.

Another messy case that has been dragging on for months involves the Hawthorn Football Club, several indigenous former players and their partners, and two high profile former coaches at Hawthorn.



What started as a club historical review into how indigenous players were treated at Hawthorn was leaked to the press, with the two coaches named. The case was then taken up as a special AFL investigation.

This investigation ended during this last week with no adverse findings made against anyone and no financial payments made. But just yesterday some of the indigenous players involved outed themselves and plan to take the matter to the Human Rights Commission. The whole saga shows how **not** to conduct a reconciliation process, with the parties never meeting together face-to-face and instead rumours and innuendo being thrown about and endlessly discussed in the media. No-one has been helped by the report and no past misunderstandings or past hurts have been addressed.

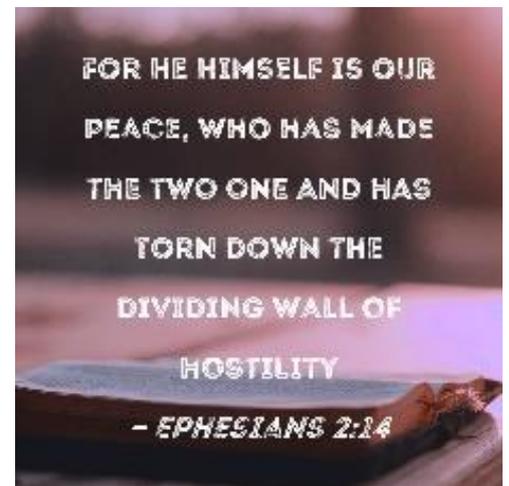
So reconciliation is a serious challenge, especially when there is significant history and hurt involved.

We've seen how reconciliation attempts to bring peace and to restore relationship between two parties that are estranged from one another and seeing the world very differently.

And we've seen how difficult this task sometimes is.

It's interesting then that the apostle Paul uses the concept of reconciliation as one of the ways of understanding Christ's work on the cross ... how Jesus brought peace between God and humanity as well as peace between Jews and Gentiles, no easy task.

In our reading from Ephesians, Paul argues that Jesus preached peace to those who were already near to God, namely the Jewish people.



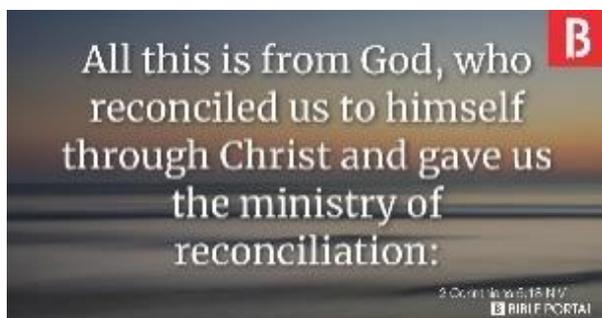
Jesus also preached peace to those who were far away from God, namely non-Jewish people like ourselves, who were not party to the covenants between God and Israel and therefore alienated from God and without hope in the world.

Jesus' death on the cross, according to Paul, set aside the commands and regulations of the Jewish Law and opened up a new way to know and relate to God the Father.

Now both Jew and non-Jew have equal access to God through Jesus and through the Spirit. And right there, of course we have an example of how Paul conceives of God as a Trinity – as Father, Son and Spirit.



But Jesus' work on the cross was about more than opening a new way to know God. It also broke down the barriers between people, creating one new humanity out of the two groups – or tribes – that were estranged from one another – Jews and non-Jews.



In 2 Corinthians, Paul takes this process one step further and argues that just as we have been reconciled to God and to one another through Christ, so we are called to be ministers or ambassadors of reconciliation ... that we have been entrusted with the

message of reconciliation to take into the world.

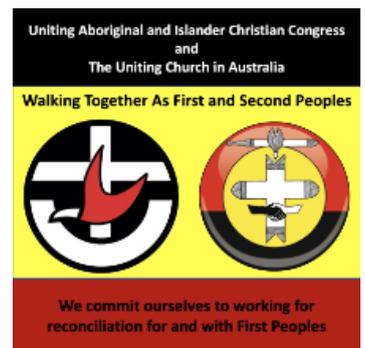
Each year from 27 May to 3 June we celebrate **National Reconciliation Week** in Australia. These dates commemorate two significant milestones in the reconciliation journey with indigenous people and non-indigenous or Second peoples in this country — 27 May is the



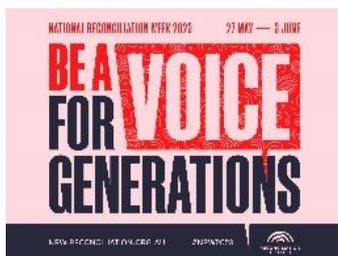
date of the successful 1967 referendum that included indigenous people in the Census for the first time – and 3 June is the date of the High Court Mabo decision that ruled indigenous people were indeed present and productively using the land before Europeans arrived, thus overturning the legal fiction that Australia was *terra nullius* or empty land prior to 1788.

As we think about reconciliation in this country, it's both a mindset and a journey. It's a mindset that is proactive in working together and walking together and having strong and respectful relationships between the wider Australian community, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

One of the strong commitments of the Uniting Church is walking together with the UAICC (Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress) as First and Second Peoples.



This reconciliation mindset of working together and walking together in Australia is being strenuously tested this year as we face a referendum on an indigenous Voice to Parliament.



It's no surprise then that the theme for Reconciliation Week this year is ... **Be a Voice for generations**, pointing to the Voice referendum later this year but also inviting us to have conversations that will make a difference for indigenous people for generations to come. The referendum – if it is

passed – has the opportunity to allow an indigenous Voice to be heard in a new way that will have ripple effects down through the future generations.

Reconciliation is also a journey. Long-standing issues and prejudices aren't usually resolved quickly. The Uniting Church, for instance, has been on a journey with our indigenous brothers and sisters for nearly 40 years. It takes time to build trust, to clarify the core issues, generate solutions and then have the political and moral courage to take steps forward.

The very brief video we're about to see now shows what has been achieved in the reconciliation journey in Australia over the past 50 years or so ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-2PerYfxoE&t=30s>

The journey for reconciliation and recognition of aboriginal people in this country has certainly been long and troubled. There have been high points along the way including the 1967 Referendum, the 1992 Mabo decision, and the 2008 National Apology to the Stolen Generations.

But there have also been many setbacks including the shocking number of indigenous deaths in custody, the failure to bridge the gap between health, education, employment and life expectancy outcomes for indigenous people and other Australians and the 2007 NT Intervention by the army.

This year there is another step in the journey of reconciliation with the opportunity to vote in the referendum that would recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were indeed the First People of Australia and give them a Voice to Parliament in matters relating to First Nations people. But we will have to wait and see whether this is a step **forward** or a step **backwards** in the journey of reconciliation.

The journey won't end with the referendum of course. Further steps in the future include truth-telling about the history of colonisation in Australia and establishment of treaties. Other steps of the journey are true acceptance of indigenous people by the Second Peoples and a true celebration of indigenous culture and language and stories.

So reconciliation is a continuing journey, travelling with each other and travelling with God, who is Creator, Redeemer and Spirit.

I want to close with a brief video recording of an interview with Uncle Vince Ross, who is an Elder of the Madi-Madi people of mid NSW and who worked for 20 years as State Director of UAICC, the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.



In this video he speaks about the Voice referendum but especially about the importance of continuing to talk to each other, or to yarn as he calls it, and of the progress towards justice and reconciliation he has seen in his lifetime.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uHuWTrm4iQ&t=278s>