

A foretaste of something more

NAIDOC 4th July 2021 Unley UC Ps 148:1-6, 1Kings 21:1-2, Romans 8:19-27, Matthew 25:31-46

Greetings friends, I am delighted to share with you this NAIDOC Sunday. Let me begin by acknowledging the sovereign First Nations Peoples of the land and waters where you are the Kurna peoples. I pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and all descendants who have care for country since creation. I also acknowledge the sovereign Larrakia Peoples of the Land and waters where I live and am speaking to you from. I pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and all descendants who have care for country since creation. Truly God was in this ancient land and with her peoples.

I have been led to share from the Scriptures something of our Covenantal journey with the UAICC and First Nations Peoples more generally, that touches upon the theme of **Heal Country** and the words of the NAIDOC committee: ***“We are all looking for significant and lasting change”***.

I have summarised the vision which accompanied the act of entering a binding Covenantal relationship between the UAICC and UCA in 1994 with these words: ***“We seek significant and lasting change through a new relationship characterised by justice and love. We are committed to a destiny together where First Nations Peoples, through the UAICC are at the heart of who we are as the UCA.”***

The key words for us today from 1Kings 21 are found in verse three where Naboth says to the King: ***“The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors.”***

For the Hebrew people there are two expressions of inheritance or heritage and for our purposes the more significant is ***Morasha***. Morasha is acquired by hard work and must be given as a precious heirloom to the next generation. Morasha has two objects in the Hebrew Scripture: First the ***land*** of Israel, and second the ***Torah*** of Israel, i.e., the ***law***.

The Bible describes both the land of Israel and the Torah poetically as a ***song***. And the Sages interpreted Morasha as if it were written ***me’orasa***, a fiancée; both the song of Torah and the song of Land are expressions of profound love and commitment says Rabbi Riskin (chief Rabbi at Efrat). Hence says Riskin, the people of Israel seem to be wedded in eternal marriage to the land – and the Land assumes an almost personal form, like the beloved bride of her husband, Israel.

Riskin tells of a radio interview with a now 96year old man Ya’acov Hazan. When Hazan was 10 he was a sick child and the doctors advised hard work so his parents apprentice him to a Lithuanian farmer. The boy worked hard beside the farmer; he noticed the farmer even though it was back breaking work always had a smile.

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He asked the farmer the source of his joy and the farmer said, “don’t you hear the music the song of the Land?” The boy heard nothing, and the farmer advised, “It’s not your land. If it were, you too would hear the song.” Hazan determine as soon as he was able, he would return to his land to hear its song. Now at 96 he still works his land, and he hears its music.

I am helped and I hope you will be too by this understanding of the connection between creation, the Creator, the Land, and her Peoples together with the Law. This Hebraic understanding is like a window which helps us understand something more of this ancient land, her peoples, their law, and the music of creation – the songlines.

For as First Nations elders have said we do not own the land it owns us, it is mother we are born of it. When First Nations Peoples sing, it is both a recognition of the ancestors and an act of eternal creation in harmony with the Creator.

So, Healing Country cannot be separated from people and law and song. Archie Roach sings as you heard at the commencement of worship: *“Heal the people, heal the land, the two go hand in hand.”* Profound theology.

“Creation waits..... creation will be liberated.....the whole creation groans.....”

Paul in Roman’s reminds us of the link between people and country and all creation. The ‘climate crisis’ is a manifestation of the broken relationship between people and the whole creation. We, my friends, have much to learn from our First Nations sisters and brothers. I want to encourage you to take opportunities to ‘walk on country’ with First Nations Peoples. Uncle Clyde, Rev Ken Sumner, Jordon Sumner and Sean Weetra lead these at Raukkan in the Coorong and Rev Dr Aunty Denise Champion and family take them in Ikara, in the Flinders Ranges. Even in Adelaide city Uncle Frank Wangutya Wanganeen and others lead walks.

The Roman’s passage reminds us that the Spirit intercedes according to God’s will. This is expressed with our hope in paragraph 3 of the Basis of Union: ***“Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity. God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church’s call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation.”***

This beloved is our hope and assurance for the whole creation, the Spirit intercedes, and the Spirit enables us to be the co-workers with Christ in this unfinished work of reconciliation and renewal. For us in the Uniting Church this is why in our journey and walking together with the UAICC in the 2009 Assembly we endorsed a new Preamble to our Constitution to further recognise our past, own the truth but importantly to recognise God was in the Land with her peoples before the invasion and the English Scriptures came, the First Nations Peoples of this Ancient Land knew Arrawatanha through creation, the land, law, story, and song.

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It is why in 2018 the 15th Assembly recognised and affirmed the sovereignty of First Nations Peoples in this ancient land. A sovereignty which was never ceded and in terms of the Statement from the Heart co-exists with that of the Crown. A sovereignty which is so much more than about land title, it is a spiritual notion. May I encourage you to do the 6-week Bible study for small groups about the Statement from the Heart. The Assembly Resourcing Unit will be beginning in August a new program; Living the Covenant Locally, which is about studying resources, and taking action. Congregations will be recognised for doing this by the local UAICC Regional Council and encouraged to encourage another congregation to do likewise.

Why have I included the gospel about the sheep and the goats? Not for what might be a normal use of this text to encourage good works. Rather in this I hope you might see that rather than the people taking Jesus with them to feed the hungry, visit the sick and those in prison, cloth and offer shelter to those without and welcome in the refugee; in-fact they may be surprised that they meet Jesus in the other. The story of Saint Oscar Romero of San Salvador is a story of a Catholic Bishop who discovered Jesus in his oppressed and impoverished flock, they shone the light of Christ into his life and the Spirit transformed his faith and life, indeed he lost his life for their sake. I commend the book and or the DVD to you.

So, friends, my experience over 40 years now living, working, and being adopted into First Nations families has been one of discovering Jesus in the other, my life and faith have been transformed.

Healing Country is about relationship, ours with God the Creator, ours in creation, ours walking together First and Second Peoples - sisters and brothers in Christ. This week the Assembly launched its first formal Covenant Action Plan – check it out on the web site.

Healing Country is about relationships where we open ourselves to the other and in this we are enabled to glimpse more of the mystery of the Creator. It is indeed a foretaste of something more discovered in relationship.

Beloved, we celebrate NAIDOC 2021 today and the ancient wisdom of First Nations Peoples. I encourage you to participate as you are able in local NAIDOC week activities. Let us today, commit anew, to the binding covenant relationship the UCA has with the UAICC, and to the broader commitment we have to all First Nations Peoples for healing country and lasting significant change,+ because Christ's love compels us.

Mägayamirri rom (like blessing you with the fullest meaning of Shalom).