



The Avenue Uniting Church

Sunday 7th July, 2024

"Thoughts for another Anniversary"

Listening for Sacred Wisdom

Gospel Reading Matthew 18:15-20

"If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If you are listened to, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If that person refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a gentile and a tax collector.

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Contemporary Reading of Grace Pastor Bill Hollingsworth

From the "Covenanting Statement between The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and the Uniting Church in Australia", presented at the 7th Assembly, 10th July 1994. Pastor Hollingsworth was the first Chairperson of the UAICC, and these words form part of his response to the President Dr Jill Tabart.

We come to this covenanting table with our gifts of Aboriginal spirituality, our culture, our Aboriginal way of loving and caring, our instinctive concern and a willingness to share and teach our history and every good aspect about being Aboriginal and Islander.

Our commitment to walk together with you as equals will be measured by our willingness to share with you our friendship and our love for GOD's creation.

Our people have survived on the fruits of this country and have harvested from gardens as diverse as nature can offer. We give to you our foods, drinks, the flesh of our animals, the fish of our waters and birds of the air that have sustained our people for generations gone by.

We pray that GOD will guide you together with us in developing a covenant to walk together practically so that the words of your statement may become a tangible expression of His justice and love for all creation. We ask you to remember this covenant by remembering that our land is now also sustaining your people by GOD's grace.

Two weeks ago in church, we celebrated the 47th Anniversary of the Uniting Church in Australia on 22nd June 1977.

This Wednesday, 10th July, marks the thirtieth anniversary of a very important event and relationship in the life of the Uniting Church in Australia. On that day the Uniting Church (UCA) and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) made a sacred Covenant with each other.

This was declared as part of the Seventh national Assembly gathering, and featured a 'Covenanting Statement' by Dr Jill Tabart (UCA President) and Pastor Bill Hollingsworth (First Chairperson of the UAICC).

The Statement spoke of the history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Christians, and recognised the brokenness that marks a significant part of this history, including the churches that came together as the UCA in 1977. Reading that document now, I imagine that it was challenging for both Dr Tabart and Pastor Hollingsworth to hear themselves saying those words.

In each case though, the hard words are mingled with words of grace, words of hope, words of faithfulness – words expressing conviction that the time was right for a new Covenant, a new way of being in relationship with each other. And it's that sense, that honest spirit and commitment to making things better, and that belief that this is the way of GOD;'s Spirit for first and second peoples, that inspires me today.

I'm talking about this with our children on this anniversary, and using this logo as illustration. I think it tells the story of Covenant simply and beautifully:



The two circles represent the logos of the UCA and UAICC. They sit side by side almost held in place by the cross that's between them. If we look at the horizontal bar of the cross, overlapping each of the circles, it seems to me a figure of embrace. As a symbol of who we are as church, the cross here holds our stories of brokenness and wholeness, of strength and frailty, and points us into deeper relationships of faithfulness to the way of Jesus.

And the reading from Matthew's Gospel reminds us of what that way looks like. I had it read in church a few months ago as part of our Lenten series on 'harmony', and it seemed good to read it again this week. It reminds us that harmony and covenant are both about deep relationship and deep courage: the courage to be honest with other about hurts and hopes, the courage to look forward in new ways of relating as people of faith.

"When you are together in my name", he said, "it's as if I am there with you": not only in our prayer, but in how we live with each other.

Sometimes our actions and relationships don't reflect that part of our calling as disciples. I give thanks for moments like this anniversary, that remind us of moments we get it right!

Blessings, *Rod Peppiatt*