

We are one with God and all people in the web of creation

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 29 May 2016

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Ivan Roberts

Pentecost 2C - Reconciliation Sunday

**Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; John 1: 1-5, 14; Contemporary Reading:
'The Sharing' by Edwina Gateley - from *Psalms of a Laywoman***

The Reflection was preceded by a Video from the
Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress: *Sharing the Congress Story*

The video and reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <http://www.pittstreetuniting.org.au/> under "Sunday Reflections" tab

1 The creative spirit of God

*I was there when the Almighty created the heavens, set the clouds in the sky,
gave the seas their boundaries and set their limits at the shoreline.
When the foundation of the earth was laid,
I was the skilled artisan standing next to the Almighty.
I was God's delight day after day, rejoicing at being in God's presence,
rejoicing in the whole world and delighting in humankind.*

Proverbs 8 (paraphrased)

What beautiful poetry, a wonderful image from the Hebrew Scriptures, the spirit of wisdom personified as a young woman (Sophia) present in the very act of creation. The beginning of wisdom is wonder in the awesome spirit of creation that surrounds us all and gives us life. The beginning of wisdom is an awareness of the interrelated wholeness of life.

This awesome insight is also profoundly present in the opening stanza of the inspired prologue of the Fourth Gospel according to St John: *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."*

In such moments of insight we sense the creation is not some random accidental event, that there has been something eternal embedded in the universe from the very beginning; a creative mind or spirit that gives meaning to our world and existence, and that we live and have our being within that eternal mystery; an awareness of the interrelated wholeness of life.

2 The beginning of wisdom

In recent years the Fourth Gospel – the Gospel according to St John – has taken on renewed significance for me when I read a particular commentary – and began reading it from the perspective of the biblical wisdom literary tradition personified in the Hebrew Scriptures by the feminine spirit of Sophia and now made flesh in Christ; the eternal truth that was there in the beginning and gives life to all.

This truth was profoundly reinforced for me just a few weeks back by one of our UAICC (Congress) members – Fred Logan – when he said to a group we were with: *“You know, God didn’t come to this place in a big ship with white sails 200 years ago. God’s always been here in this place. Our people have known that for thousands of years. It’s just that we didn’t know the little boy there by God’s side.”*

The little boy by his side!

Fred went on to share how for him, as an Aboriginal Christian, that ‘little boy’ (Jesus) had revealed the presence of God in a whole new way that enabled him to associate, interpret and integrate, the spiritual insight and faith of his own Peoples – who have known this sacred creative presence embedded in the land since the beginning of time – to relate that with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the ‘light of all people’.

For Fred, I sense, the ‘good news’ of Jesus Christ did not discredit or displace the wisdom and insight of his own people – the First Peoples – but enables him to understand the spiritual journey he is on as one of unfolding mystery and a search after truth that has existed *“since the foundation of the earth was laid.”* A seamless thread from the ‘dreaming’ of the First Peoples, through the wisdom of Sophia and profoundly revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

3 The inter-relatedness and inter-dependence of God’s creation

However, not only was this creative spirit of God present from the beginning, but that spirit was also the life and ‘light of **all people**’ in John’s prologue, ‘delighting in all **humankind**’ in the spirit of Sophia.

The creative spirit of God, present in the act of creation, was not solely the God of the Hebrews, but delighted in all humankind; the ‘Word made flesh’ in the Gospel was the life and ‘light of all peoples.’ (Can we see what this means?) The wisdom of Sophia and the ‘Word made flesh,’ there from the beginning, awaken within us an awareness of the inter-related and inter-dependent wholeness of our world and all peoples.

As I reflected on the inter-relatedness of God’s creation I was reminded of the words of the great Indian political reformer – Mahatma Gandhi – who once said: *“I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find God apart from the rest of humanity”*.

It is a profound statement not only about the inter-relatedness of creation, but also the interdependence of humankind in all its diversity, differing cultures and differing life experiences; or, in the spirit of wisdom (Sophia) this morning, we *“rejoice at being in God’s presence, rejoicing in the whole world and delighting in humankind”*.

4 Reconciliation in Australia

What has all this to do with the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation 2016?

That all of us who, like Sophia, delight in the creation and sense we may be created in the likeness of God, are called to be agents of reconciliation and healing within our own land.

As Gandhi reminds us, if any human being suffers injustice or is oppressed or marginalized then we are no longer in harmony with the Spirit of God who created us in wholeness and intends us to live in peaceful unity with all creation. While Aboriginal people continue to be marginalized and ignored, whilst their stories remain un-heard or worse, denied, then we and God's creation cannot be whole.

Just as in ecological terms our survival depends on how we care for the whole of creation, so too our own wellbeing and the physical and spiritual wellbeing of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters are inextricably bound to ours.

While the life expectancy of Aboriginal people remains around 10 years less than for other Australians we are all diminished as a people; while the infant mortality rate for Indigenous children is nearly twice that for all Australian children we are diminished as a society; whilst the unemployment rate for Indigenous adults remains at 16% we are all diminished.

And yes, whilst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children live in fear of physical and sexual abuse from their own and other men folk, then we too, are diminished as a society.

Not until all people are able to share in the inter-related wholeness of God's creation expressed through the wisdom of Sophia and John's prologue can we fully claim to be in tune with the spirit of Christ.

Or in the words of Aboriginal woman Lilla Watson: *"If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine then let us work together."*

5 The challenge before us

Let us then take into our being the inter-related/inter-dependent wholeness of God's creation and become Christ's agents of reconciliation and healing within our own relationships, our own communities, Australian society and the world.

And as the formal apology by the Australian Parliament a few years back acknowledged the pain and hurt of past deeds, so now let us work in consultation – in covenant relationship - with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in addressing issues that are the legacies of those policies; issues of health and the life expectancy of children, encouragement for Aboriginal people to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities that emerge, and yes, in consultation – in consultation - covenant relationship - with Aboriginal people, address issues of social dislocation – physical and sexual abuse – in their communities, but also be honest and admit that these are problems that exist in the wider community as well, and not choose to criminalise their whole culture.

So then - let us take to heart the words of Gandhi: *We are a part and parcel of the whole, and we cannot find God apart from the rest of humanity*; for then, and only then, in harmony with the spirit of Sophia and the Word made flesh, in harmony with all creation, will we truly understand and experience the beginning of wisdom. Amen.