



## **Star Trek**

In 1977 - the same year that the Uniting Church in Australia officially came into existence - the US Space Agency, NASA, launched the Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 space probes. These probes were designed to explore the outer reaches of the solar system, and in particular, the gas giant planets Jupiter, Neptune, Uranus, and Saturn.

The mission succeeded beyond NASA's wildest dreams. Spectacular, literally never-seen-before images of these planets and their vast array of moons were sent back by both probes. And although the images returned by both probes are crude by today's standards, at the time they were both gobsmackingly detailed and packed with never previously available information.

Scientists learned that some of the moons surrounding these planets had active volcanoes, while others were entirely composed of glacial sheets beneath which lurked oceans that might harbour the ingredients for life. Likewise, never-seen-before planetary rings were discovered orbiting some of these planets, rings that were previously invisible to even the most powerful telescopes on earth.

Both probes long ago left the heliosphere - the region of our solar system directly affected by the Sun's radiation. Voyager 1 is travelling at approximately 61,000 kms per hour and is approximately 23.8 billion kms from the Sun.

Voyager 2 is travelling at approximately 55,000 kms per hour and is approximately 19.8 billion kms from the Sun. Despite these astonishing figures, both probes will take approximately another 14-28 thousand years before they leave the Solar System proper and venture out into interstellar space.

But one of the truly amazing things about Voyager 1 and 2 is that both probes carry a golden disc, on which is inscribed information about earth, the human species, and various examples of human culture and language. And one of these items is a song of welcome to country performed by a group of indigenous people from the Northern Territory of Australia.

That's a pretty astonishing thing to think about - that somewhere out in the vastness of space, there is an example of Indigenous Australian culture and ceremony. What is more, that culture and ceremony is predicated on welcome and hospitality.

It certainly gives one pause for thought when considering the present deplorable state of the "debate" surrounding the Voice referendum. Irrespective of your views on the issue, the debate itself is being conducted with a good deal of posturing, scare-mongering, dog-whistling, and personal abuse. It was especially disappointing for me to see the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Dutton, refuse to attend the recent Garma Festival on the grounds that it was a "Yes Vote love in" (his words) when, in fact, the Garma Foundation, who organise the festival, are non-partisan and welcome Australians of all backgrounds and opinions.

The idea that the Voice will "divide" Australians along racial lines is, in my view, completely wrong - when it is not actually racist or motivated by political opportunism. Likewise, the idea that enshrining a Voice into federal parliament will result in all sorts of legal challenges and constitutional complications, is similarly misleading; the same thing was argued in relation to the Apology to

the Stolen Generations, and yet these fears have not been realised.

Some people, for whatever reason, seem incapable of accepting the idea that the Voice is primarily about welcome and invitation - an act of hospitality that invites Australians to reconsider the history of and relations between First and Second Nations, and to enter into good faith change that resets our present course toward justice and reconciliation. Instead of possibility, they see only threat; instead of opportunity, they see only challenge to their own privilege and power.

This is in stark contrast to Jesus' attitude to welcome. Jesus engaged with both sinners - those deemed "unrighteous" by the religious and secular authorities - as well as with the authorities themselves. He broke bread with tax collectors and sex workers and the diseased, as well as with Pharisees and temple officials. Jesus welcomed people indiscriminately in order to invite them into a new way of being, a new understanding of self and others.

It is a sad irony that we are able to send messages of welcome into interstellar space, where there may - or may not - be life to receive that message, but we are unable to reciprocate when it comes to our fellow Australians and Indigenous sisters and brothers. Hopefully, attitudes will start to shift soon, and we will be able to emulate the generosity of spirit that Jesus showed and which I believe the Voice articulates.

### **Four U News**

The next meeting of Four U is **Monday 14th August in the Fellowship Room**. Heathmont's own Tracy Barron will be hosting a presentation combining discussion of the Uniting Group's functions and volunteer requirements. Also touching on the gender conversation that some members miss on Easter Monday earlier this year.

## Remember In Your Prayers

Please continue to remember Marj Roberts and her family in your prayers, and give thanks for her ongoing care as she transitions from hospital to rehabilitation.

## Remember These Dates!

If you enjoyed our recent fellowship with our friends at Ringwood Uniting Church, please note these future dates for shared services and their locations in your diary:

Oct 29 – 5th Sunday in the month (Ringwood)

Nov 26 – Christ the King Sunday (HUC)

Blessings,

Brendan



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