



All Change!

This week marked the 16th anniversary of the issuing by the Federal Parliament of a formal apology to the Stolen Generations.

In light of this anniversary, there has been some commentary along the lines of, "if we were able to issue an apology back in 2008, why couldn't we vote in the Voice in 2023?" There are many complex and nuanced answers to this question, but my own assessment is rather more simple. The apology didn't demand anything of the Australian people. No change was involved. The Voice, on the other hand, did demand something very significant of all Australians - it demanded a significant change to the structure of race relations in this country.

In other words, the apology was an example of what the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace". And by using the word "cheap", I don't mean to lessen the significance of the apology for the Stolen Generations or the fact that the apology came from the Federal Parliament. Rather, I mean that it was "cheap" in the sense that it didn't cost us anything, it didn't demand anything of us as a nation. We could say the words and pat ourselves on the back and convince ourselves that attitudes had changed and that we were a better nation - all the while ignoring the fact that, for Indigenous Australians, the on-the-ground reality was no different than from before.

The Voice, however, is what Bonhoeffer called "costly grace". It demanded something of us and came with a price tag attached. And that price tag was not

merely recognition of the lived reality of Indigenous Australians, it was recognition of their unique status as indigenous people - a status that entitled them to an advisory say in matters directly impacting on their lives. In particular, the Voice demanded two things of us. Firstly, it demanded that we give up power - even if it was only to share power in an advisory capacity. Secondly, it demanded that we recognise the lie behind the slogan "all races are equal in Australia" and openly acknowledge that this is not the truth - and that Indigenous Australians are the least equal of all.

And, frankly, as a nation we squibbed it. Confronted by the price tag of "costly grace" and the demand for real as opposed to symbolic change, we balked and decided that we'd rather believe the lie of "racial equality" than face the truth of profound injustice and inequality.

Those who were present at last Sunday's service will remember that, during my sermon, I mentioned a cartoon I had once seen. In the cartoon's first panel, a minister asks the congregation "Who wants change?" - and everyone puts their hand up. In the second panel, the minister asks "Who wants to change?" - and everyone puts their hand down. In other words, everyone likes the idea of change; but when it comes to the fact of change, we are less enthusiastic.

Or, to put it more bluntly, everyone is in favour of change - so long as their special interests are left undisturbed. So long as they can continue doing things the way they've always done them, and so long as their particular points of privilege or convenience can be left in place.

And the Church is no different. Those who wield power and authority and influence within the Church want the structures that protect their power and authority and influence kept in place. Those who are comfortable with a certain form of worship or certain forms of community or theological expression want those forms to continue. Those who are happy with the Church as a particular

expression of history or culture or society likewise want them to endure.

But, as I also reminded the congregation on Sunday, ours is a faith that calls us to radical change. God, to quote another German theologian - Karl Barth - is on the move. Jesus was peripatetic - he travelled from one place to another. But he also spent his public ministry encouraging us to repent - that is, to turn around, to change direction and alter course. The word "repent" means to turn back, to re-align oneself with God. In other words, to change who you are now in order to become a different you tomorrow.

Big change is coming to the world. Climate change will impose new realities on humanity whether we want them or not. Big change is coming to Australia. As with South Africa and East Timor, the voice of justice cannot be stifled forever, regardless of our preference for "cheap grace". And big changes are coming to Heathmont. The need to envisage new possibilities for the future will confront us, regardless of whether we want them or not. Our decision is whether we want the costly path of change or the cheap grace of present convenience.

"See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity...I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live..." (Deuteronomy 30: 15, 19)

No Service This Sunday at HUC

As advised at last Sunday's service, there will be no service at HUC this Sunday. Church Council encourages HUC members to join our friends and neighbours at Ringwood for worship.

Remember In Your Prayers

Members at Heathmont will remember Nancye Ross, who was for many years a prominent member of the congregation. Sadly, Nancye passed away recently and her funeral service will be held at HUC at **1pm on Monday 26th February 2024**. Please remember Nancye's family in your prayers at this time of sadness and memory.

Please also continue to remember Ross and Judy Scholes-Robertson at this time of ill-health for Judy.

AGM

Please note that the congregational AGM will take place after worship on Sunday 17th March 2024.

Pikelet Day

Thank you to all who participated in the Pikelet Day on Sunday and the Coffee Cup Challenge over the last 16 weeks. We raised a total of \$395.10 which was higher than I hoped so well done all participants. The funds raised will go towards those people less fortunate than ourselves who struggle to cope with rising prices and rental increases.

Working Bee

A Working Bee will take place on Saturday 24th February, many hands make light work so please give some thought to helping keep our property safe and in good condition.

Pew Polishing

As mentioned at church last week, I will be making a start on polishing the pews on March 6th at 9.30 am and continue on through the month of March when hopefully we will have done all the wooden furniture we have in the worship space. Chair cleaning is also on the agenda and will be done during the School Holidays perhaps in early April when there are no CLC classes.

The World Day of Prayer

The World Day of Prayer will be taking place on FRIDAY 1st MARCH at 10am at Ringwood Uniting Church, 30-32 Station Street Ringwood, on the corner of Greenwood Avenue. The service has been organized by the people of Palestine.

Blessings,

Brendan



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Our mailing address is:

Heathmont Uniting Church
89 Canterbury Road
Heathmont, Victoria 3135

Australia

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