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What's Really At Stake

You may have seen media reports recently about the political storm that has blown up following the High Court's decision that the indefinite detention of asylum seekers on the grounds they have been convicted of serious criminal offences in their country of origin is illegal. Essentially, the High Court have ruled that detention, in the context of criminal conviction, which has no prospect of release is unconstitutional because it denies the possibility of reform and release back into society, and hence the concept of the proportionality of punishment that is one of the cornerstones of Australia's justice system.

The debate surrounding this decision has typically been cast in political and electoral terms, with the Federal Opposition accusing the Government of being "soft" on "border security", while the Government has rushed through legislation enabling the re-incarceration of asylum seekers covered by this judgement. The fact that some of the asylum seekers released as a result of this decision have subsequently been charged with further offences has only added to the political heat surrounding this issue.

Unfortunately, what all the political posturing and blame-gaming obscures is the fact that this is not a debate in the abstract about concepts like "border security" or "community safety" - on the contrary, it is a debate that touches on people's lives and the consequences for a whole community of people that stems from the language that is used about them.

To be clear: no-one is denying that some of the asylum seekers covered by this judgement have been convicted of serious crimes in their

countries of origin, including murder, rape, and other serious offences. Others have been convicted of less serious crimes. But the idea that all, most, or even a sizeable majority of the asylum seekers impacted by this judgement have been convicted of serious violent crimes is simply not true. Indeed, as a number of commentators have noted, many of these individuals had already completed their sentences before seeking asylum in Australia, and most have also passed security checks by Australian officials.

But what the political furore also disguises is the fact that the indefinite detention system that was the subject of the High Court ruling is a system and policy that has been supported by both sides of politics. In other words, both the Coalition (who created the policy while in government) and the ALP (who have supported the policy while in Opposition and Government) are responsible for putting in place the very system of indefinite detention which the High Court has ruled to be unconstitutional. Thus, the finger-pointing and blame-mongering that has characterised the political response to this judgement is an exercise in distraction - the entire body politic is attempting to escape accountability for an outcome for which it is collectively responsible.

Even worse than this, however, is the language that is being used to characterise, not just this group of asylum seekers, but refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants as a whole. The attempts to exploit this judgement for political purposes (or to minimise the political impact of the judgement) have once again cast asylum seekers - without distinction between the different groups and categories of asylum seeker - as a "threat". Whether as a "threat" to Australian "security" to "community wellbeing", or in some other regard, asylum seekers are once again being characterised as a "danger" that needs to be dealt with via harsh punitive measures.

This characterisation is especially egregious as it ignores the extensive research that has been undertaken in many countries that demonstrates that even when there are high levels of undocumented (or "illegal") migration, crime levels actually go down overall because such immigrants are substantially less likely to commit crimes (including violent crimes) - for the very simple reason that they don't want to come to the attention of the authorities. Moreover, by casting asylum seekers as "threat", our politicians are ignoring the lessons of history: when we start viewing entire categories of human being as a "threat" we give ourselves permission to dehumanise them and regard them as "not one

of us" - and that in turn justifies and facilitates the most horrendous abuses.

Jesus never used other people for the purposes of his own advantage, or in order to characterise them as anything less than human. Irrespective of what you think about the asylum seeker issue and the fact of indefinite detention, Jesus' own example of always engaging the humanity of those whom he encountered leaves us with no justification for the kind of careless and inflammatory language that has characterised the recent political debate. Even when Jesus was being critical of the political and religious leadership of his time, he always cast his criticism in terms of their relationship with the people, and of the need for that relationship to mirror God's call into covenant. Jesus never sought to dehumanise or use language that appealed to prejudice - it's a pity our politicians (many of whom claim to be Christians) don't do likewise.

Combined Service and Lunch 17th December

A reminder that the service on the 17th December is a combined service at Ringwood followed by a spit-roast lunch at noon.

Notes From Congregational Meeting

For those of you who were not able to attend the congregational meeting last Sunday and thus were not able to hear Church Council's presentation regarding the future of HUC, Council have agreed to make available the information slides which accompanied the presentation. Please [click this link](#) to access the PowerPoint presentation.

The Christmas Bowl Appeal 2023

The Christmas Bowl Appeal is currently being run during Advent at HUC. This important Ecumenical Appeal helps many people around the world and you can help by giving to the Christmas Bowl in one of three ways.

Envelopes are available in each of the pews at church, or you can call 1800 025 101 to donate by phone, or by one of two the internet addresses. For the tech savvy, use the christmasbowl.actforpeace.org.au or the unique donation page address for Heathmont Uniting- mycb.link/75432.

Glenis McDonald, Christmas Bowl Ambassador

WORKING BEE SATURDAY 16th DECEMBER 2023

Our last Working Bee for 2023 will be held on SATURDAY, 16TH DECEMBER from 9am till 12 noon. Please, if you can only attend for an hour, this would be a great help. There is a wide range of jobs to be done, so there is one that you would be able to do. The Property Committee looks forward to seeing lots of people in attendance. Morning Tea will be provided.

Mal McDonald

Secretary, Property Committee

Library Trolley

The library trolley in the foyer has a quiet ministry going on during the year where books are donated, people buy a book for a gold coin donation and the revenue collected is sent to the Presbytery Mental Health Ministry.

This year, David has sent off \$724 to the MHM made up from \$600 through the Church accounts and \$124 from the coins collected from the Library Trolley. If you have saleable books to donate to the library trolley, please place them in the tubs under the trolley and of course browse through to see if there any others you may like to donate for a gold coin.

Glenis McDonald, sorter and tidier of books

Halleluiah Chorus Concert

On Wednesday 13th December at 7:30pm, Ringwood Uniting Church will host a rendition of George Fredrich Handel's famous Halleluiah Chorus.

But it won't be just any old concert - attendees will also have the opportunity to join in the singing of this Christmas favourite. For full

details [click this link](#).

Blessings,

Brendan



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