

Aboriginal Sunday (organised by Common Grace Australia)

24<sup>st</sup> January 2021

Contemplatio: Michael Wood

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**[Video address from Auntie Jean Phillips]**

*“I am not asking on behalf of them alone, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one”*

*(John 17.20-22)*

As I listen to Auntie Jean Phillips I hear the strong theme of relationship. This is, of course, is one of the beautiful features of Australian Aboriginal cultures – conversations typically begin with ‘where do you come from’. Who are your family? Auntie Jean begins her address by reminding us that we all have a shared history on this land – aboriginal and nonaboriginal people together. And yet how many of us have ever had a long conversation with an aboriginal person, let alone a Christian aboriginal person?

‘where do you come from?’ ‘who is your family’? This is a hugely significant theme in John’s gospel. As we heard last week, two of John the Baptist’s disciples first question to Jesus is ‘where are you staying’, which is actually, ‘where are you abiding’. And the answer, from the perspective of John’s gospel is that Jesus abides in the Father, that is, in God. And then, as the story unfolds, we discover that God desires to abide in us, in Christ, through the Spirit.

In his great extended prayer in Chapters 15 to 17, this theme just keeps getting repeated over and over in multitude of ways – that the disciples love for one another is completely tied up with the absolute loving relationship between the Father and Son in the Trinity. This is our model for love. How does God love the world – God loves the world by dying for the world. That is the height and breadth and depth of God’s love. And because God loves US that way, we are given the promise that can love each other that way, through Christ’s presence in us and through the power of the Spirit.

Paul develops this theme in terms of how if one part of the body of Christ is suffering (1 Corinthians 12:26), then we cannot ignore that – our destinies are tied up together in a shared body. So that is precisely what Auntie Jean Phillips is teaching us and reminding us here. How can aboriginal people, who have suffered and are still suffering so much from the invasion of this continent, and non aboriginal people who have benefited so much from living here – how do we journey together as part of the same body?

It is so easy for non-aboriginal people to get defensive when all this is raised. Some of the defensive manoeuvres I hear are:

- I'm not going to apologise for anything – I have done nothing wrong
- All Lives matter, not just black lives
- I'm not going to feel guilty about being white

These reactions all have elements of truth in them but they all serve to prevent the kinds of conversations which may benefit us all. As we've just heard from Auntie Jean Philipps, by and large Aboriginal people are not asking non aboriginal people to feel guilty. Guilt can just be another form of self-indulgence. That kind of defensive manoeuvre blocks the potential for conversation.

Auntie Jean Phillips is a Christian speaking to fellow Christians. She is asking:

- How can we get to know each other better?
- How can we journey together (which is not doing things TO people or FOR people, but doing things WITH people)?
- How can we build bridges?
- How can we bring true reconciliation?

And she ends with this beautiful theological bottom line, *'only the cross and the gospel will bring healing to our nation....only the power of the gospel can transform this nation'*. This is because the gospel of love, through the power of the Spirit, has power to dissolve our ego defences and implanting within us a divine love which is deeper than just doing things because they make us feel good. This love IS the humility and self-emptying of Jesus.....a love which places ALL of us under the cross of love and does not allow any of us to take a higher position than washing each other's feet.

So what might be a small next step we can take? Auntie Jean is inviting us fellow Christians into prayer, so that we can LOCATE ourselves and our shared journey within divine love. This will help keep us steady and on track as brothers and sisters on a shared journey.

If you would like to be part of it, there is a concrete opportunity to do this tomorrow afternoon, on the eve of Australia Day, by joining the Change of Heart prayer service. I will circulate the details of this by email. [www.commongrace.org.au](http://www.commongrace.org.au)