

Aboriginal Sunday

Sermon for the Parish of South Darebin, 19 January 2025

By the Reverend Dr Linda Fiske, Vicar

John 2: 1–11 The Wedding at Cana, a miracle story that reveals the nature of Jesus

At first glance, the story of turning water into wine may seem far removed from the issue of a just outcome for Indigenous people but, as we think on it, we see that this is a story of revelation. Jesus is revealed as the one who can create what we assume is impossible. It is to him we must look for inspiration and guidance.

The wedding story pivots on the point of timing. Mary says to Jesus, 'They have no wine.' Jesus replies 'What does your concern have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.' Mary says to the servants 'Do whatever he tells you.' We know this gospel is about the extravagant love of God. The best wine materialises at an unexpected time.

A clumsy segue way comes in the form of two questions: Can you and I do whatever Jesus tells us? Can we embrace the notion of unexpected miracles?

Now I shift gear to Indigenous spirituality but I do that in the light of the failed Referendum. Only 39.9 per cent of votes were in favour of an advisory Voice to Parliament for Indigenous people. Distrust won that vote. I need to make some important qualifications as I begin this reflection. There is no Australian mindset. Neither is there an Indigenous view, or an entity called The Church. We cannot speak in absolute terms, but the 39.9 per cent support is an objective fact to work from.

Last week a parishioner sent me an *Age* article by Anson Cameron lambasting 'the church' for its colonisation of Indigenous spirituality. While we might find instances of such attitudes and behaviours, there are others working assiduously to set wrongs to right. Last week I said that asking questions is part of healthy faith-process. We learn as we question and wonder. So I ask what did people fear from the Voice referendum? I will give you a psychological and spiritual answer rather than a political one. We fear the darkness of our own soul. Part of the human psyche is to want more and to crave individual recognition. We cut off these and many other aspects of our nature that we just can't accept. In psychology these qualities make up our Shadow. What we reject about ourselves we project outward onto 'the other'. The psychiatrist Carl Jung tells us that our life's work is to integrate our shadow side and to expand our awareness. This is how we become more empathic, compassionate, and tolerant.

So, when it comes to Indigenous folk and their beliefs, or Muslim belief or Jewish belief, what we don't understand we reject and may even demonise.

Concerning the Referendum, I think there was also some FOMO at work: fear of missing out. This was bought home to me by a Greek friend who said: 'Why should Indigenous people have a say? My people have been factory fodder in this country for generations and no one has given us a say!' I was shocked by this comment. It moves me to reflect that often our response to what we don't understand is fear and even anger.

Now I return to the issue of Indigenous spirituality which offers us the potential for rich learnings. As seekers of an unseen God we are familiar with methodologies to bring us into closer contact with ... him? 'And *her*' is an important issue. Why do we use patriarchal language to call God 'he'?

We envisage God in different ways. Benedictines use contemplative prayer. The Jesuits use Ignatian spirituality. Across the globe, different faiths adopt practices to assist in their devotion. Buddhists use meditation, Muslims use bodily-focused prayer; so do Jews, with the Kabbala or received wisdom of theology handed down over generations. Why do I raise these examples? They point to a human need to reach beyond ourselves to spiritual Truth. Humans know that otherness is mysterious. The mystery can be feared or respected, and we are always limited by our cultural experience. Difficulties arise in the human family when we assume that ours is the *right way*!

So I return to the richness of Australian Indigenous spirituality. I can see that the emphasis on singing and dance links with Ignatian spirituality because it takes the whole body and the senses into story. I can learn from that!

We are familiar with the literary devices of simile or metaphor. Think on how they deepen meaning:

For you will go out with joy and be led forth in peace: The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy and the trees of the field will clap their hands. (Isaiah 55: 12)

So, why are we unnerved by speaking of Earth as mother, animals or plants personified and coming alive in Spirit? The western scientific method tells us that unless we can measure or count or categorise attributes in the physical world, they have no validity. But those who profess a Christian faith believe in deep-truth that rests in the Spirit. We experience a richer life as we embrace the Spirit in the physical world.

Safina Stewart, *Common Grace* Relationship and Storytelling Coordinator says:

In a spiritual sense, the wounds of Christ are reflected in the sky above Australia in the Southern Cross. It is a reminder for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that Jesus knows our pain, and yet through His pain has given us hope and possibility for the future. We look to Jesus to give us guidance on the way we should go forward.

I now have a new way to look on the Southern Cross in the night sky.

I am not attempting to conflate Christian theology and Indigenous spirituality. I am saying that we need a way forward that fosters mutual respect for different ways of viewing the *mystery*.

We have to guard against cultural appropriation and spiritual colonialism through education, sensitivity and vigilance. Does this mean I will be without fault going forward? No. But I need to start somewhere.

So, I return to the wedding at Cana. The wine had run out, and the celebration was threatened. Jesus told his mother that his hour had not yet come. I wonder if we are in a similar situation. We need to change our thinking before we can live together in a harmonious way. We need to appreciate and celebrate difference. We can listen to Mary's words: 'Do whatever he tells you'. For, if we were to do that, we would surely find Common Grace and God's extravagant abundance awaits.

Amen

Reference

This sermon drew on resources prepared for Aboriginal Sunday by Common Grace, developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Leaders. For more information about Aboriginal Sunday, visit: [Aboriginal Sunday 2025 - Common Grace](#)