

Setting the oppressed free â?? four suggestions on Aboriginal Sunday

This was the sermon preached by the Rt Revâ??d Chris McLeod, Dean of St Peterâ??s Cathedral and National Aboriginal Bishop of the Australian Anglican Church to mark Aboriginal Sunday, 23 January 2022

> You can watch Bishop Chrisâ??s sermon in its entirety on the first 13 minutes of this video from last Sundayâ??s service

Aboriginal Sunday

Today is Aboriginal Sunday â?? the Sunday before Australia Day.

Let me remind you of the key concepts behind the day.

Aboriginal Sunday was started by an Aboriginal Christian minister and activist called William Cooper.

William Cooper was a Yorta Yorta man coming from his traditional area which is near the junction of the Goulburn and Murray Rivers in Victoria.

William Cooper was secretary of the Australian Aborigines League which was formed by members of the Melbourne Aboriginal Community.

He promoted today as a â??Day or Mourningâ?? and a day when sermons should be preached drawing attention to the injustices experienced by Aboriginal people and calling for equal rights and full citizenship.

In time Aboriginal Sunday was replaced by NAIDOC week where the focus would shift to celebrate Aboriginal culture and tradition.

However, in recent years there has been a call to highlight Aboriginal Sunday as lead up to the conflicted celebration we call Australia Day.

It should be made firmly clear that William Cooper was solidly Christian and his concerns were based in his Christian convictions and experience of injustice.

William Cooper greatly influenced the ministry of Sir Doug Nicholls â?? Cooper was his great uncle â?? the first and only Aboriginal Governor of any state in Australia. In 2022, that in itself says something.

What should we do? I have just four suggestions!

â??Tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me Godâ??.

Words that are familiar from numerous court room television dramas.

â??Truth tellingâ?? has become a major theme for discussions around First Nationsâ?? justice.

We have nothing to fear from telling the story of our nation with all honesty. It will include stories of violence (sexual, physical, and psychological), massacre and genocide, the forced removal of land and children, and numerous other injustices, but there will also be stories of hope and expressions of humanity at its best.

Christians are â??Good Newsâ?? people, but we have never shied away from addressing sin when we encounter it, and calling people to repentance, including whole nations.

A Voice to Federal Parliament.

Our nation needs to hear the voice and wisdom of the First Nationsâ?? peoples.

Over 60, 000 years of experience and wisdom is of utmost value to a nation that, officially, is still very young.

Resolving the issues around First Nationsâ?? justice demands that First Nationsâ?? voices are listened to, and the shaping of a nation in desperate need of reconciling its past and present.

Get our people out of jail.

Raise the age of juvenile criminal responsibility & stop the First Nationâ??s incarceration

Intergenerational incarceration is a serious problem for First Nationâ??s peoples.

Over 30% of our gaols are occupied by First Nationsâ?? peoples.

In the Northern Territory it is over 80%.

Our juvenile detention centres are primarily occupied by First Nationsâ?? children. Incarceration is cyclical, setting up recidivism, poor educational and employment prospects, poor health outcomes, suicide, and the very serious possibility of death in custody.

The current movement towards â??Raising the Ageâ?? is asking to raise the age from 10 to 14.

I would argue that 14 is still too young to put a child in jail. For the long term benefit of First Nationsâ?? peoples, and society at large, more work needs to be done at the â??grass rootsâ?? level around breaking the cycle of crime and poverty.

The money needed to be spent must surely outweigh the heavy spiritual, physical, and mental health costs borne by First Nationsâ?? peoples, and the high financial cost of incarceration.

Preach the Gospel

The Gospel is liberating for all.

It is Good News for all.

William Cooper was convinced of the power of the Gospel to transform lives, as was Doug Nicholls, as are many other Aboriginal Christian people.

Salvation involves the whole of our lives, not just parts of it.

Saving souls alone is platonic not Christian â?? â??we are souls and bodiesâ??, as the Book of Common Prayer states. Where injustice continues no-one is totally saved; no one is totally free.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lordâ??s favor.â?•

Amen.

What does 26 January mean to you?

On the eve of 26 January 2022, here are some links to resources/events/inspiration to consider what 26 January means to you and who you will share your thoughts with.

Reconciliation SA:
https://reconciliationsa.org.au/news/reconciliation/a-few-ways-to-be-respectful-on-january-26-3/?mc_cid=3443be444e&mc_eid=fcc02fbff6

Anglican Board of Mission:
https://www.abmission.org/pages/australia-reconciliation-program.html

Events in Adelaide 2022

Smoking Ceremony
An acknowledgement of First Nations people is being hosted by Kaurna elders at Elder Park, welcoming everyone to participate. The event features music, art, and speeches to bring in Survival Day.
The event is free but bookings are essential. It starts at 8am.
https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/smoking-ceremony-tickets-226740626317

Survival Day Event at Tandanya
Will not be held this year, Please see image attached.

Common Grace:

Aunty Jean Phillips, Senior Aboriginal Christian Leader, invites the nation to #ChangeTheHeart on Tuesday 25 January 2022 7:30pm AEDT
https://www.commongrace.org.au/aboriginal_and_torres_strait_islander_justice

Australians Together: https://australianstogether.org.au/stories/

SBS: https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/search/reconciliation

NITV: https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/

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