

Learn

[A week of devotions based on Isaiah 32](#)

The dislocation of 2020 was shocking, leaving us suddenly without recourse to a force that invaded our lives, threatening us and our families, our lifestyle and our livelihoods.

A year after Alison and I returned to Australia after 13 years away, we attended Surrender Conference which included a 'Welcome to Country' ceremony. We were surprised and delighted to realise that we were finally home. Afterwards, thanking Aunty for leading the gathering, she asked "who are your people?" Smiling at my confused response, she encouraged me to "go find them". I have been around the world, proudly calling myself Australian, but I have not learned who I really am until I "know my people". I pray that this week of reflection helps you connect with your people right here at home. This learning takes time and is a core work in our being reconciled to ourselves and to others – putting to work the work of the cross!

The attitude we learn is as important as the information we gather, so I invite you to reflect on these couplets of formation and information each day

Learning about the first peoples of this land can lead us into a compassionate engagement with their experience, and a coming to know for ourselves; but first we need to hear how palawa lives were disrupted. Follow the blue underlined links to discover more!

"May the God of all wonder who set the stars in the sky,
bless you with relentless unsettledness -
that drives you to seek truth." – [Brooke Prentis](#)

Day 1: Learning Land

Read

Isaiah 32:1-2; See, a king will reign in righteousness
and rulers will rule with justice.

² Each one will be like a shelter from the wind
and a refuge from the storm,
like streams of water in the desert
and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.

³ Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed,
and the ears of those who hear will listen.

⁴ The fearful heart will know and understand,
and the stammering tongue will be fluent and clear.

"To not know your country causes a painful disconnection, the impact of which is well documented in studies relating to health, wellbeing and life outcomes... It is this knowledge that enables me to identify who I am, who my family is, who my ancestors were and what my stories are. We are indistinguishable from our country which is why we fight so hard to hang on." Catherine Liddle, Arrente and Luritja woman, and Aboriginal activist

"The land is a link between all aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's existence - spirituality, culture, language, family, law and identity. Each person is entrusted with the cultural knowledge and responsibility to care for the land they identify with through kinship systems. Rather than owning land, people develop strong intimate knowledge and connection for a place that is related to them. The intimate knowledge of a place forms this strong connection that is inherent to Indigenous identity." [Common Ground: Connection to Country](#)

Reflect

Righteousness is at the core of the redemption story. We are called to righteousness and are provided shelter by it. As we seek right relationship with those around us, eyes are opened and what was hidden becomes obvious. This week as we learn, let our eyes be opened to the truth that will lead us into right relationship with our aboriginal neighbours.

Consider/Act

What can I do to comprehend the way aboriginal people relate to the land?

Is there something for me to learn from the first nations of this land about my relationship with God's creation?

Are there things I can do to bring myself into a more 'righteous' state with this land?

Consider reflecting on the Statement from the Heart through a [study from ABM](#) either alone or with a group (Check the Diocesan website for the next online study)

Day 2: Learning Agriculture

Read

Isaiah 32:5,6;

⁵No longer will the fool be called noble
nor the scoundrel be highly respected.

⁶For fools speak folly,
their hearts are bent on evil:

They practice ungodliness
and spread error concerning the LORD;
the hungry they leave empty
and from the thirsty they withhold water.

Psalms 119:7

⁷I will praise you with an upright heart
as I learn your righteous laws.

“Bushes and trees, as well as grass, were necessarily associated and distributed. Grass eaters seek shelter as well as feed, and feed-shelter associations (“templates”) must be carefully placed so as not to disrupt each other, as this would make target animals unpredictable and the system pointless.

Given how long eucalypts live, templates might take centuries to set up. Each needed several distinct fire regimes, continuously managed and integrated with neighbours, to maintain the necessary conditions for fire-stick farming.

Two factors blended to entrench this, one ecological, the other religious. Ecologically, once you lay out country variably to suit all other species, you are committed to complex and long-term land management. Aboriginal religious philosophy explained and enforced this, chiefly via totems. All things were responsible for others of its totem and their habitats.”

Bill Gammage, The Biggest Estate on Earth, [article in The Conversation 8/12/2011](#)

Reflect

Many of the assumptions used to justify inhuman treatment of the first nations peoples across these lands now called Australia were based on a failure to recognise widely practiced agricultural methods. This in turned saw the widespread destruction of indigenous crops and hunting grounds which was strenuously resisted by the palawa peoples who resented the intrusion of these unlawful invaders.

These assumptions however are no longer sustainable; we have [overwhelming evidence](#) to show agricultural architecture that predates anything else in the world, surviving to this day.

Consider/Act

How did I feel when 2020 disrupted my plans? How would that change if those changes threatened my life and my food supply? What would I do to protect my family?

What do I know of original aboriginal practice in these lands? What am I willing to do [or read](#) to correct my "folly"? What would motivate me to explore 60 millenia of lived experience and research into sustainable life in this land?

Day 3: Learning Language & Culture

Read

Isaiah 32:9;

⁹You women who are so complacent,
rise up and listen to me;
you daughters who feel secure,
hear what I have to say!

Matthew 11:29

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Reflect

The official line was that Tasmanian Aboriginals had been wiped out. Task accomplished. "Extirpated" was the word used to distance the colonial invaders from the truth of murder. The great loss, however was not just in lives taken, but the loss of language, culture and knowledge of country. We have lost so much!

Yet the people continue to this day. The children of Fanny Mae Cochrane and others have survived and are working hard to regain their lost inheritance, gleaning truth from snippets left behind.

What do they ask? Not revenge, but allyship. Support as they navigate a way forward, for them and for us. In the [Statement from the Heart](#) we are invited "to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future."

What will we get? We will all be enriched when the children of lutruwita (Tasmania) rise up!

Consider/Act

What can I do to be a good ally/neighbour to the palawa peoples? What can I learn of language and culture that will strengthen them in their journey? What palawa names do I know for places near my home?

Access a map of palawa placenames and more on language and culture [here](#)

Day 4: Learning History

Read

Isaiah 32:10-11;

¹⁰ In little more than a year
you who feel secure will tremble;
the grape harvest will fail,
and the harvest of fruit will not come.

¹¹ Tremble, you complacent women;
shudder, you daughters who feel secure!
Strip off your fine clothes
and wrap yourselves in rags.

“Although the colonists eventually prevailed, Aboriginal people around Australia resisted incursions onto the land, often tenaciously, with violent and tragic outcomes.” [Professor Larissa Behrendt](#)

As well as legacies of death and dispossession, the colony left a legacy of deliberate forgetting. Our neighbours across the Tasman Sea acknowledge and now formally commemorate the 19th-century New Zealand wars. The first Rā Maumahara, a national day of remembrance, was held on October 28 2017.

The Black Wars of Tasmania (1824-1831) have been cited at the initiation of the term ‘genocide’ as the prime example of the word. Governor Arthur’s declaration of martial law effected open season on palawa peoples, claiming the lives of more than 200 colonists and between 600-900 Aboriginal people.

Reflect

It is said that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it’s lessons. We commemorate Australia’s part in numerous wars around the world, but there is no memorial anywhere for this most fierce battle for Tasmania. Why are we still unable to tell the truth about this chapter of our history?

The Statement from the Heart invites us to acknowledge this past and move forward.

“Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.”

Consider/Act

What do I usually do after a disagreement?

What makes this difficult?

How might Australia make a move toward ‘Makarrata’?

Do I have a part in this? What can I do today?

Day 5: Learning Family

Read

Isaiah 32:12-14;

¹² Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields,
for the fruitful vines
¹³ and for the land of my people,
a land overgrown with thorns and briers—
yes, mourn for all houses of merriment
and for this city of revelry.

Matthew 9:36

³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness. [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#)

By the time of Truganini's birth, the Nuenonne clan was diminished and traumatised... a group of sailors rushed at the family as they sat around their fire. Manganerer and the children dashed into the safety of darkness (but) the sailors held fast to his wife... Truganini may well have seen her mother resisting... before they vanished into the dark, leaving her ripped body leaking a pool of blood... around 1826 John Baker, a sealer took Truganini's two sisters. Truganini never saw her sisters again. In 1829, disaster had struck Manganerer for a second time... convict mutineers had abducted his second wife and sailed to New Zealand... He attempted to follow in a sturdy ocean going canoe, but had been blown far out into the Southern Ocean. His son had died and he was half dead from dehydration when found by a whaling ship. His distress was compounded when he discovered that almost all of his clan had succumbed to disease. Within a few months he, too would be dead... From [Truganini Cassandra Pybus](#)

Reflect

Trauma is the only description of the experience of palawa peoples from the moment of European contact. Loss of family, culture, the wherewithal to feed and clothe and protect their families came inexorably with the arrival of the boats. This trauma has continued with the Stolen Generations and even now as black lives are lost in police custody.

There have been over 540 Aboriginal Deaths in Custody since 1980 - over 440 of these since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody released their report in 1991. This grieves the heart of God. CommonGrace.org.au

Consider/Act

Lament is the first appropriate, compassionate response. Then, valuing the lives and the stories of those who have been taken so brutally, it is important that we [learn the names and stories](#), we lament together, we pray without ceasing and we act to see change. CommonGrace.org.au

Day 6: Learning Story

Read

Isaiah 32:15-17;

¹⁵ till the Spirit is poured on us from on high,
and the desert becomes a fertile field,
and the fertile field seems like a forest.

¹⁶ The Lord's justice will dwell in the desert,
his righteousness live in the fertile field.

¹⁷ The fruit of that righteousness will be peace;
its effect will be quietness and confidence forever

Mark 5:30-34

³⁰ At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

³¹ "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' "

³² But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³ Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Reflect

The story of Israel finds its completion in Jesus Christ, King of kings. Yet this same Lord of all stopped to allow an outcast woman to tell her whole story, allowing her to both witness to his power in her life and to access the healing already wrought in her body. The telling of story is a powerful means for healing and for building relationship.

Consider/Act

Who has listened well to you? How did you feel after?

Is there someone you might seek out to listen to today?

What have you heard of the story of aboriginal Tasmanians? Where could you learn more?

(There is a booklist on the Diocesan website!)

Day 7: Learning neighbourliness/allyship

Read

Isaiah 32:18-20;

My people will live in peaceful dwelling places,
in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest.

¹⁹ Though hail flattens the forest and the city is levelled completely,

²⁰ how blessed you will be,

sowing your seed by every stream, and letting your cattle and donkeys range free.

Leviticus 19:15

'Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

Luke 10:35-37

³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

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We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country. [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#)

Reflect

Jesus is calling us to be good neighbours; The Statement from the Heart is asking the aboriginal people be allowed to "...take a rightful place in our own country." What might that look like? How will we know when we are there?

The Samaritan paid for the care of the roadside victim; is there a cost for us to participate in this healing process?

Consider/Act

What am I willing to contribute to the empowerment and restoration of palawa peoples?
What would be fair?