

Connect

A week of devotions based on our connection with God and with each other

“Uncle Tongue, Uncle Tongue...” This was the confusing cry to me of two Gamilaraay kids some years ago. We were living in Boggabilla, on the Qld/NSW border. It was my first ‘solo’ Parish, and we were living in a small country town that was pretty much 50:50, Black and White. Just across the border in Qld was Goondiwindi, scene of the 1984 race-riots, and numerous other racially-motivated ‘incidents’. Our time there was certainly not without experiencing some of the prevalent ‘social issues’.

I say the cry was confusing at the time, because I was not related to these kids, and yet they were calling me ‘Uncle’. I knew lots of ‘Murri’ members of the community were termed ‘Uncle’, or ‘Auntie’, but here these kids were, calling the White Anglican Minister in town, ‘Uncle’.

Though I’d had some experience working in Aboriginal communities previously, when I went to Boggabilla, I was still really a novice in terms of Aboriginal culture, and my own lack of racial awareness. But I was keen to learn. As much as possible, I tried to mix in with the local people, and just to sit and listen and experience – trying my best to ‘Connect’. When we were leaving the district, one of the local land-owners in the Church commented that I was the first minister they’d had who really tried to relate to the local Murrus. And I guess that had borne results – I was not ‘related’ to these kids, but we had come into ‘relationship’. Slowly but surely, a degree of connection had grown between myself and the local community. I had been accepted – and become – “Uncle Tongue”.

Our Heavenly Father calls us into ‘Relationship’ with Himself, through Jesus Christ. The commencement of this process can be almost instantaneous, but still, it takes time for that relationship to grow and develop, as we spend time together, listening and learning from each other. And the One with whom we grow in that relationship is the ‘Lord who made from one blood all the nations of the earth....’ And He is about bringing all people together in Christ.

Day 1: Relationship with God

Read

Genesis 1:1 - 2:25

Reflect

God IS relationship (within himself), and built relationship into the Creation. People are created for relationship - with the Creator, with creation, and with one another. Without proper relationships in all these spheres, we are not fully human, as God created us to be.

Consider/Act

How are my relationships functioning? Are there things I need to change to build more healthy connections – with God? with others? What relationships and connections do I currently have – and what would I like to have – with the original inhabitants of these lands?

Day 2: Broken relationships

Read

Genesis 3

Reflect

Sin enters through human agency, and all relationship is fractured; all connections are broken. Humans' relationship with their Creator, with the creation, and with one another are all affected, and no longer function as they were intended. The future restoration of all these relationships in Christ (THE seed of the woman) is foreshadowed.

Consider/Act

Though it is only in Christ that all will fully be restored, what actions can I take today, ...this week, ...into the future, to help make connections, and rebuild and strengthen my relationships with God? ...with the natural world? ...with other people? ...with aboriginal peoples?

Day 3: God's goal is restored relationship

Read

Micah 4:1-5

Reflect

this image is for the future – God's fulfilled Kingdom – where all nations will be restored, reconciled and brought together in perfect peace, harmony and understanding. The image is of the heavenly Jerusalem, the 'Bride of Christ' (cf. Rev. 21:9-14), not just an earthly, temporal Zion. It is where connections are truly forged and relationship is perfected, between individuals, nations, people and God.

Consider/Act

Since 'the pure and spotless Bride' (Rev.) is what we 'are' (in the spiritual/eternal realms), how should we be living, practically, towards God and other peoples now?

Day 4: All drawn together in Christ

Read

John 12:27-33

Reflect

While it is important that people of all faiths and none work together at building connections and strengthening relationship with one another, what is the ultimate source of unity and reconciliation? For all peoples to be drawn to 'the Christ who is lifted up', what does that mean for the drawing together of those who are thus drawn to Christ?

Consider/Act

An old Murri lady in our NSW community, a beautiful Christian woman, used to travel around to various speaking engagements, talking about her experience as one of the 'Stolen Generations'. She used to finish her talks by telling audiences that Black and White would only find truly restored connection to one another in first being connected to Jesus. How do you react to that claim?

Day 5: All creation groans

Read

Genesis 3:17-19, and Romans 8:18-25

Reflect

the Creation is still "Good, Good, and very Good (Gen 1 & 2). But it is also subjected to frustration, longing to be set free from its bondage to corruption and decay. These lands now called Australia sustained their original human inhabitants for thousands of years – but that was also not without toil and hardship. Broken human 'relationships' in these lands has further strained our relationship with the Creation.

Consider/Act

More recent arrivals in these lands have much to learn from the original inhabitants about carefully stewarding them. But together, we must manage God's Creation wisely and thankfully, whilst also eagerly awaiting together the renewal to come. What aspects of human relationship to creation do you think we can and need to do better at – especially as we learn from our Aboriginal brothers and sisters? What stresses and strains in that connection to Creation must await our final redemption as God's sons and daughters?

Day 6: Breaking down dividing walls

Read

Ephesians 2:11-22

Reflect

Relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians have been fraught (to say the least) from the beginning. Paul is instructing Jew and Gentile to put away their long-held hostilities, as they have been broken down in Christ. As is so often the case in his teaching, it's a case of "this is how you are.... so, this is how you must be."

Consider/Act

Think of current situations you know of where relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples are strained. Can you think of specific situations where you have seen the 'dividing walls' being broken down (or at least lessened). What part can, and should, we play as Christians to help make that 'spiritual reality' a present, practical experience?

Day 7: A new heaven and a new earth

Read

Revelation 21:1-4

21 Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,”^[a] for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’^[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Revelation 7:9-17

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”

¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying:

“Amen!
Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honor
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.
Amen!”

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

¹⁴ I answered, “Sir, you know.”

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore,

“they are before the throne of God
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne
will shelter them with his presence.

¹⁶ 'Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.

The sun will not beat down on them,^[a]
nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne
will be their shepherd;

'he will lead them to springs of living water.'^[b]

'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'^[c]"

Reflect

Here is the fulfilment of what was envisaged back in Micah – all God's perfected people, the spotless Bride of Christ, from every nation, tribe, people and language. And they are dwelling together in perfect connection and unity, in the new heavens and the new earth. The curse of sin is finally done away with, the Creation no longer groaning in travail, and all dividing walls broken down.

Consider/Act

How does this picture make you feel? Express your praise and hopes (and present frustrations and longings?) to the Lord. Resolve to take actions to make this glimpse of eternity more real in all your relationships today, and especially in building connection with the first peoples of these lands.