

# St. Margaret's Uniting Church Mooroolbark

**Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2017**  
**6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

GOSPEL READING Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 *The Parable of the Sower*

## REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES

There is a provocative line in a song by Midnight Oil that says,  
“How do we sleep while our beds are burning?”

The song speaks of European impact on Aboriginal Australians. It calls for an honesty about land and tenure and the obviously false ideas that this place was vacant land (*terra nullius*) when Cook planted a flag and declared the eastern half of the continent belonging to the king.

My time away up north has been more challenging than listening to a Midnight Oil song, but it has been the same songline. And back home, now, I continue to think about what response in the name of Christ I am called to, and what kind of story telling I bring to this community of faith.

This is not the right place to get into the finer points of constitutional law or things like the *Doctrine of Discovery*, but a quick summary of the time away: Our Yolngu and other Indigenous brothers and sisters in Christ are clear that they do not accept the outrageous claims of land for the crown by Cook or others. They also say that have never agreed to give up their land or culture or law. They have never been conquered. They want their birthright back.

This week one of the readings is the story of Jacob and Esau and stolen birthright. It is a story of power, abuse of that power, favouritism and deception. It is not a particularly edifying story, but it is a snapshot of the truth of human behaviour.

Esau was the first born to Isaac and Rebekah. In the patriarchal system of his clan, it meant he was to inherit all the priveleges of land and

wealth from his father. But Rebekah favoured the second son, and so they hatched a plan to deceive Isaac and Esau, and cheat the first born of the inheritance.

Jacob took advantage of his older brother. Esau had been out hunting for a long time and had almost collapsed with fatigue. Jacob had cooked up a delicious stew, and would only feed his brother in exchange for the birthright – or what was not rightly his.

The song might have been written for Rebekah and Jacob. 'How can they sleep while their beds are burning?'

Well they couldn't. Jacob at least had to flee the mess he had caused, because he couldn't bear the consequences.

In the news yesterday there was yet another article about teaching Australian values, this time to counter propaganda from China. But what exactly are Australian values? Are they values like our wealth was grown on the sheep's back? Are they values of 'a fair go'?

I wonder what our first peoples make of either of these 'values'?

While the story of Jacob and Esau is disturbing to the core, it is also a story of God's redemption. Despite the worst that humans can do, the love of God has the power to break through and transform. And this seems to be the point of the gospel story, where the sower goes out to scatter seed.

Where the stolen birthright story is one of human power and privilege, the sower story will not play into such things. If it did, the seed would only be available to the most promising soil, or the most suitable recipients of the message of God's love. But this is not the way of the sower. Seed is scattered seemingly recklessly. The birds feast on seed on the compacted paths. Shallow soil also gets its share of seed, as do the places where thorns will choke this precious commodity.

If you were the sower, and you had to buy the seed from Monsanto, I'm sure you would be far more careful.

But the sower ignores our games of power and privilege. The seeds are for all. There is no trade of money or birthright or food. The seeds are scattered as freely as the love of God is shared. It is there for all to receive, regardless of the fruit it promises to bring.

And where the soil is receptive, it does produce in abundance. The parables of Jesus usually have a moment of surprise once they have drawn folk into the story. The surprise is probably not so evident to us moderns, but the best Palestinian soil might produce some 2000 years ago would be a ten-fold yield. Imagine the surprise at ten times the best, or even six, or three times!

The love story of God is sown in extravagance, and when it takes heart, the transformation in someone is extraordinary.

I've seen the radical transformation that God's love and redemption brings. I know it in my own life, as I know it in the lives of people here. I also know it in the lives of many Aboriginal Australians, despite the many struggles they have with power and privilege stories where they have been victim to more recent arrivals.

The love story of God revealed in Jesus Christ has gone viral in many Indigenous communities over the years. This is because first peoples recognise the story, a bit like the time when the apostle Paul speaks to the Greeks about their altar to an unknown god. The story of God has lived in the heart and the land of first Australians through law and custom and spirit, and the story of Jesus Christ brings alive the stories they believe have been given them by God.

The story of God is always sown in extravagant love.

And like Jacob and Esau, the love of God can bring reconciliation and commitment to a new way, even when we have no chance of turning back the clock.

The call of the gospel is to be released from the burden of power and privilege over and against others, and rather invite the story of God to bear one hundred fold fruit in our lives. And part of that fruit is to be as extravagant as the sower.

Go and do likewise, says Jesus. God and do likewise.

**WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD:**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

WE REFLECT through song 'Amazing Grace', *Gurumul & Paul Kelly*

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

... In the name of Christ, your sins are forgiven.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**