

## A THEOLOGY OF REMEMBERING JUSTLY, LISTENING DEEPLY, REPENTANCE, FORGIVENESS AND SALVATION

The Anglican Diocese of Bunbury acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, live and worship and we recognise their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay our respects to the First Nations Peoples of these lands, the Noongar peoples of Pindjarup, Wiilman, Koreng, Wudjari, Wadandi, Kaneang, Pibelmen and Minang Noongar elders, past, present and emerging.

Let us remember:

Thus says the Lord:  
A voice is heard in Ramah,  
lamentation and bitter weeping.  
Rachel is weeping for her children;  
she refuses to be comforted for her children,  
because they are no more;

Thus says the Lord:  
Keep your voice from weeping,  
and your eyes from tears;  
for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord:  
they shall come back from the land of the enemy;  
there is hope for your future says the Lord:  
your children shall come back to their own country.  
*Jeremiah 31:15-17*

In this story as the chosen people, the Israelites, identified here as the children of Rachel, one of Jacob's wives, were exiled and now they hear the promise of restoration.

The bitter experience of the Israelite people is of exile, massacres, early deaths, imprisonment and injustice, illness, slavery and human trafficking all being removed from memory by the political power over them, covered over, normalised and made invisible. These stories and memories are re-remembered at the birth of Jesus, when Herod killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, out of fear and with overwhelming hubris, using oppression and power to control the circumstances and pre-empt God's plans.

We hear this story in sorrow, freshly from the First Nations Peoples of Australia. White settlers killed, massacred and oppressed God's First Nations Peoples of Australia, leaving a remnant in 'exile' in their own ancient land. Their children were stolen and killed, turned into slaves and their connection to their land was extinguished, their songlines were interrupted and lost, their language forgotten, their dreamtime obliterated and they became barren as a woman without children.

Rachel is weeping once again for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.

By the waters of the great rivers and seashore we sat down and wept:  
when we remembered our own country.  
As for our music and dance and our weary feet and voices, we were dried up:  
there were no trees in the land where we were, no creatures, no seasons, just whiteness and blindness.  
For there those who led us away captive required of us dreams and songlines:  
and those who had despoiled us demanded laughter and gratitude, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of your country, your place'. We cannot see or hear you.  
How can we sing the Great Creator's song in in our land made strange?

If I forget you, O my country: let my hands and feet and voice forget their purposes.  
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth with the dryness and dust of death:  
if I do not remember you, if I do not prefer my country above anything else, I am dead.  
*Psalm 137:1-5 Reworked*

The children of the First Nations People were stolen and removed from families, creating stories, like the children King Herod killed. Jesus reminds us with great compassion:

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.’ *Matt.5:4*

We stand in solidarity with those who witnessed and experienced the horror of this great inter-generational sin and destruction. Today we invite sacred memory back into being through the gatherings and communities of First Nations Peoples. We know such memories are communal and they exist without the help or support of those who are not First Nations People. The First Nations Peoples have survived despite white settlers’ demands and coloniser attempts to obliterate and ensure ‘terra nullius’.

The courage and commitment of the First Nations People are beyond reckoning.

Memory and language define the identities of the First Nations Peoples upon and in whose country the Diocese is located.

To be First Nations in Australia today, is to remember the death and massacres, the wiping out and theft of culture, land, identity, family, language, songlines and dreaming.

To be Christian is to remember the state sanctioned murder of Christ and Christ’s resurrection. The passion of Christ, lived and seen and remembered from the Exodus and first exile of the Israelites through to the promise of hope by the Risen One, is an experience shared with the First Nations People.

Christians today have a deep and abiding commitment to memory. Every Sunday we spend time remembering. Memory gives us identity, community, the future and God (2021:96ff). Memory defines our identities. To be a Christian is to remember not only the exile for our ancestors with God’s covenant and promise for the future, but also the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. We don’t just remember the past; we act in the present, (mourning, witnessing, seeking restorative justice, loving our neighbour as ourselves), and we have hope for the future (for a just and peaceful reign of God through the Risen One).

We seek to remember correctly and justly, remembering no more and no less than what happened. We seek to remember we are all sinners, and Jesus died for us all. Our sins and our remembering are gathered up by Christ and transformed through love. Christ suffered in solidarity with those who suffer. Christ’s compassion and love offered to each of us, also offers us liberation, from our sins and the bitterness and grief of our suffering at the hands of others and from the memories continuing to kill us. As Christ was raised, so also will those who suffer be raised with him. They are not forever imprisoned in their present suffering or tormented past. Along with Christ, we are on the path through death to resurrection, in this life and the next. (2021:113)

The memory of Christ’s suffering and death is dangerous for all victimisers and oppressors who leave a trail of destruction, blood, unfair gain, political power and injustice, and for all who seek to gain from this system supporting such suffering and the evil doers. As we remember the suffering of Christ and the suffering of those who have been wronged, we are invited by Christ into the service of the Crucified one for the good of humanity, of all peoples who live with us in God’s creation.

In our own ways and times and places, Christ's followers remember him by re-enacting his solidarity with the victims of oppression.

We are committed to truthful remembering, whether each of us personally is accused or justified. We are remembering to make sure such memories are put to the service of seeking justice and opposing any further wrongdoing; and, to ensure just relations are established now and in the future. We are committed to future wellbeing to make sure we do not become resentful, vindictive and sour as we remember responsibly through experiencing Christ's rising again. (2021:124-125)

We are invited now and with all Christians in the Anglican Diocese of Bunbury to remember what has been done to our First Nations Sisters and Brothers, the Noongar people. This was accepted by our ongoing silent complicity, through lack of awareness, blind white privilege and accepted cultural norms. We forgot God's love for all God's creation, over the centuries in our Anglican churches and parishes. . As we journey together through the passion of Christ who died for all of us, we believe and hope we will remember justly through Christ's death to resurrection.

Jesus unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

Luke 4:17-19

Let us together in this work of the Diocese and of God, proclaim the good news of the Lord's favour.

### **References**

Volf, M. 2006, 2021. *The End of Memory. Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA., Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing Co.  
Bible, NRSV