



## Graced Relationship

### THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD

The Gospel metaphors of shepherds and sheep, grape vines and vineyards, can be a challenge for 21<sup>st</sup> century people living in urban settings. For the people of Jesus' time, however, these were familiar parts of their agricultural world. Small vineyards and wine making were a major part of daily life, so these became rich sources of imagery for describing God's relationship with the people and the land.

From the psalms and the prophets, the Hebrew people also recognised Israel as the vine God had brought out of slavery in Egypt and planted in fertile land. God was known to them as the nurturing keeper of the vineyard. When Jesus described his relationship with his disciples as being like a vine and branches, their actual experience of nurturing grape vines to produce fruit, would have spoken powerfully of an intimate and life-giving relationship.

Living in God's vineyard means living with God's mercy, forgiveness, love and the hope of transformation through justice for all. Life in God's vineyard will only flourish if the powerful and strong care for the poor and vulnerable. The vibrant images of life and growth speak of the relationship we have as disciples with the Risen Jesus, and of our interconnection with others and with the whole earth community.

### CONNECTION WITH OTHERS

In Australia, 'others' includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who for around 65,000 years have developed an intimate understanding of the lands and waterways that make this country. This profound relationship has been handed down over generations, recorded through song, dance and art.

Non- indigenous urban people can struggle to understand this relationship. The removal of Aboriginal people from their ancestral lands has broken their connection with the life and growth that formed their languages and cultures. The loss continues to be devastating. Aboriginal people consider that the land owns them and that every aspect of their lives is connected to it. Palyku woman, Ambelin Kwaymullina explains:

*For Aboriginal peoples, country is much more than a place. Rock, tree, river, hill, animal, human – all were formed of the same substance by the Ancestors who continue to live in land, water, sky. Country is filled with relations speaking language and following Law, no matter whether the shape of that relation is human, rock, crow, wattle. Country is loved, needed, and cared for, and Country loves, needs, and cares for her people in turn. Country is family, culture, identity. Country is self.*

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### SOME SIGNIFICANT DATES

It is **54 years** since the National Referendum when over 90% of Australians voted to remove two clauses from the Australian Constitution that discriminate against Aboriginal people.

It is **35 years** since Pope John Paul II visited Aboriginal people in Alice Springs. He identified four important issues:

1. He challenged all Australians to ensure the preservation of Indigenous cultures and to keep working for an inclusive multicultural Australia.
2. He called us to seek and explore the points of agreement between Indigenous traditions and those of Jesus and all his people.
3. He praised the way the Indigenous peoples had cared for the land and then challenged us to learn together how to preserve our fragile environment.
4. Finally, by naming past hurts and continuing injustices, Pope John Paul II confronted us as a nation with the need to move towards true reconciliation.

In 2015, Pope Francis wrote in *Laudato Si*:

..... it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture. n 146

It is **30 years** since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody. Over 450 Aboriginals have died in custody in that time; 7 in March of this year.



It is **28 years** since Mabo overturned the notion that Australia was 'terra nullius' or 'nobody's land'.

It is **13 years** since the National Apology made by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to Aboriginal people.

It is **4 years** since the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, a historic consensus of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It seeks constitutional change to enable a Voice to Parliament in the Australian Constitution. It was presented to Government and was refused.



Bridge walk for Reconciliation in 2000

### DADIRRI

Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann AM, a member of the Ngangiwumirr language group, born near the Daly River, beautifully expresses

watching and waiting. This is an extract from a talk given in 1988:

*Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. This is the gift that Australia is thirsting for. It is something like what you call 'contemplation'.*

*We learnt by watching and listening, waiting and then acting. Our people have passed on this way of listening for over 40,000 years. ...*

*In recent times we have come to listen to a most sacred word that comes to us from God, our Father. This new Word is Jesus. I have said how dadirri, which is the deep listening and quiet stillness, can make us whole and revive us. This is a special quality in our lives. It is born in our culture. The Word of God finds a home here. Jesus enriches and renews our culture.*

*Our Aboriginal culture has taught us to be still and to wait. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course - like the seasons. We watch the moon in each of its phases. We wait for the rain to fill our rivers and water the thirsty earth ...*

*We wait on God, too. His time is the right time. We wait for him to make his Word clear to us. We don't worry. We know that in time and in the spirit of dadirri (that deep listening and quiet stillness) his way will be clear.*

*... there are deep springs within each of us. Within this deep spring, which is the very Spirit of God, is a sound. The sound of Deep calling to Deep. The sound is the Word of God - Jesus.*