

# Australia Day Yr B 17-18

Just what is this Day and what are we celebrating? Good questions and about time we started to ask them. They give us time to pause, examine the past, explore what we have presently learnt (or not learnt) and move on towards a future that because of the nature of change will be different from our present time.

The 26 January is not the day Australia came into existence. That occurred on 1 January 213 years later. What happened in 1788 was the establishment of a penal colony on discovered land, given the title of New South Wales. Other colonies were to follow on land first known to the world as the Great South Land of the Holy Spirit.

In 1901 those rather distant, selfish and small minded colonies through the farsighted and hard work of a few managed to cobble together a Constitution, one which leaves out more than it should by the way, in order to cater for the self-interest of six communities, which allowed the Commonwealth of Australia to come into existence.

As the first Prime Minister Edmund Barton said, "For the first time in history, we have a nation for a continent and a continent for a nation".

But in this development something was left out altogether. The land was not the legal fiction of being empty, ownerless, there were people here before the convicts and soldiers, before the free settlers, before migrants, before refugees, before the boat people.

It took until 1966 to recognize the original inhabitants of this continent and, until 1992 for the law to recognize that they may still have land rights.

With acknowledgment to Slim Dusty:

*Looking forward, looking back  
We've come a long way down the track  
Got a long way left to go  
Making sense of what we've seen  
You and I, along the track  
Looking forward, looking back.*

And here we are today caught between past ignorance and superiority on the one hand and reluctance and indecision for the future on the other. In our present predicament it is timely to listen to God's words for today.

In ways that we, relative newcomers, don't understand the Aboriginal People had a spiritual affinity with the land. In the Jewish scriptures we find this too -surely no coincidence. In the chaos of his time the Prophet Isaiah was able to look to the future in confidence,

In the wilderness justice will come to live and integrity in the fertile land. Integrity will bring peace, justice give everlasting security. Isa 32 32:17

*Likewise, the Psalmist could sing of, a time when,  
Faithfulness shall spring from the earth  
and justice look down from heaven  
The Lord will make us prosper  
and our earth shall yield its fruit.  
Justice shall march before him  
And peace shall follow his steps. Ps 86:12-14*

Yet the future can make us anxious. Jesus takes us along with him in the very poetic exaggeration of the birds of the air and lilies of the field to encourage us to build up within ourselves a basic heart-felt attitude to God. Get that right first and other things, including legitimate concerns about life, our needs and problems, will fall into place.<sup>1</sup>

At the heart of our continent is Uluru. It's not just a rock; it is a place to inspire awe and wonder and for some, a place of spiritual significance.

Our hearts are at the core of our being and determine our attitudes and actions. It begs the question if they are to be more than a rock and a hard place. Do our hearts inspire us into the awe and wonder of a relationship with God?

It is then that we become free from selfishness in all its forms and open ourselves up to the often unpleasant truths of our nation's past; the very slow recognition of people and rights thought best forgotten and which now have become a pressing need to move forward with maturity and confidence.

It is only in this way that we can become a continent fit for a people and a people fit for a continent.

St Paul, no stranger in facing a difficult future, reminds us today.

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in Spirit, serve the Lord.*

*Rom 12:9-11*

We've come a long way down the track  
Got a long way left to go...

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<sup>1</sup> Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God A Reading of Luke's Gospel*, Strathfield NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2009, 116