

# ***An Outback Reflection***

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020 for Season Of Creation – Outback)

## 1. The Outback



Barren

Still, silent, empty – yet teeming with life, a feast for our senses.

Fearful – is that why we live on the seaboard gazing outward instead of looking inward to the centre?

More than a back drop to Priscilla Queen of the Desert or Mad Max.

If only we let the expanse enfold us.

## 2. God and the Outback

Our mothers and fathers in the faith knew it to be:

- a place of testing
- a place of wandering
- a place of grumbling
- a place of surprises as manna fell from heaven

Jesus discovered who he was and what his ministry would be.



## 3. Lake Mungo

Mungo Man and Mungo Woman walked this land thousands of years ago, the oldest civilisation on earth. Returned now to the land and finally at rest.

Like a moonscape, beautiful, vast.

Desecrated by farming and industry but now restored to its former glory.

I lament and seek forgiveness for the way we have harmed the land and its people.



## 4. Uluru

A great monolith at the centre of our land.

You cannot climb, why would you? This is mother earth giving birth.

Thousands of years of wind and rain have eroded her. How I long to see the rain rush over her.

Stories and song lines and culture have emanated from her, telling the story of how it all came to be.

I give thanks for the indigenous people who have cared for her.



## 5. MacDonnell Ranges

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A young indigenous man sitting cross legged on the ground, paintbrush in hand, painting the country of his birth and sharing all he received with his people.  
Women singing in the gorges, old German hymns but sung in language.  
Waterholes to rest beside, clear blue skies, vivid red rocks and stones  
The universe on display - the stars, planets above.  
I give thanks for the landscape, for its beauty.  
I lament that we counted people as flora and fauna, that we took their culture away.



### 6. Wave Rock & Hippo Yawn

At sunrise, alone I stand under the rock, in the place countless others have stood before me.  
Scared but in awe.  
Rock carvings – I feel the history of this ancient land.  
I give thanks for the stories, the history of this timeless place.



### 7. Rabbit Proof Fence

Remnants of a fence, bits of wire and wood, the Rabbit Proof Fence, extending from Esperance to Port Hedland to keep the rabbits out.  
But ...  
A guide for two young girls taken from their family to find their way back to their mother, twice!  
Brave, desperate, tenacious, hearing the call to return to country and mother.  
I lament our policies that lead to the stolen generation and the trauma caused.



### 8. The Pinnacles

Land pulled from the sea.  
Little and large outcrops of limestone eroded by water and wind.  
Full of surprises – galahs on top of rocks, quandongs fruiting, young roos hiding,  
And ...  
Emus bathing, splashing around, washing and having fun after late night rains.  
I give thanks for the surprises found here.



### 9. Lake Ballard

40 degree heat  
Noon  
Pondering an encounter with a goanna on the road who seemed to look up at me,  
and ask 'why are you here'?

Tentative steps on the salt pan that is Lake Ballard.  
Shadows of sculptures and of me cast on the salt  
Mirages, shimmering sunlight.  
A huge expanse, a harsh expanse.  
I give thanks for the warmth, the wildlife arising from seemingly nothing.



10. Silos  
Tall on the flat landscape.  
Some full of grain, others long empty.  
Faces of the people of these parts, who lived and worked this land.  
A harsh land, a resilient people.  
I give thanks for their long days to produce that which sustains life.



11. Flowers of the Desert  
Arising out of the red soil
- Their vivid colours
  - Delicate flowers
  - Life in unexpected places
  - A landscape - not barren but teeming with life
  - Stunning
  - Diverse
- I give thanks for the beauty, the fragility.



12. Victoria Outback  
Crops  
Land ravaged by droughts and floods  
A hard life  
My grandmother using a radio to teach her children, later School of the Air,  
now online  
Bush nurses  
Royal Flying Doctors  
I give thanks for their perseverance and resilience.



Conclusion

I cannot explain the power of the outback.

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Its colours, its ancient history, its vastness.

I do not know why it gets under my skin.

I do not understand why it is in my blood and feels like I have come home.

I do know:

- its beauty
- its surprises
- its silence
- its peace
- its harshness.

I give thanks to the Creator of this wide brown land.

I can do nothing less.