

Being One – Whoever We Are

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on May 29th 2022 – John 7:20-26)

Mem Fox sums it up so well. We are all very different and yet we are all the same. We might wear different clothes, eat different food, speak differently, live in different kinds of houses, have different kinds of jobs, look different, learn differently but fundamentally we are all the same. We all dream, we all search for meaning, we all laugh and cry, we all want the best for our friends and family, we all want peace. We are one and our difference is what makes life interesting and colourful.

It is National Reconciliation Week and I would like to introduce you to Aunty Alice who helped me learn this very lesson as a young adult.

I met Aunty Alice when I was a young university student and she was the first indigenous person I had spent any considerable time with. During a Uni break I went with a friend to do some painting at the Bomaderry Children's Home in New South Wales. Whilst we worked, we stayed at the home. Aunty Alice had spent most of her life there, first as a child and then later as a worker. Aunty Alice and I were as different from each other as you could be, she an indigenous person who had been removed from her parents as a child, me I had stayed home until I was 19 years old. She was from country New South Wales, I from a large university town. She was Aboriginal, me from English stock. She hadn't really had much education, I was just starting my university career. I was a young adult, she was old enough to be my mother.

And yet ...

She, over a week or so showed me how much we had in common. I quickly learnt we shared many dreams and hopes, we laughed and cried, we had similar dreams for the kids in her care. We were both committed to our faith and one Sunday after she as one of the few black people attending a morning service at a 'White' church, later that day I as one of the few white people attending an Aboriginal Service in a shed in a paddock outside of town. I will let you decide which one I preferred.

In that week we laughed so much together, turns out we had a similar sense of humour. She welcomed me into her world with open arms, accepted me with all my awkward questions and understandings about indigenous matters. She oozed love and acceptance. It was many years later I found she had told her story to the enquiry into the stolen generation, and I found myself reading it and weeping tears for her. She taught me that despite the colour of our skin we both laughed and wept the same, dreamt the same and hoped the same.

Jesus in his living and speaking desires that we all will be one. Not the same but that we might be unified. We should not be surprised by this. Afterall, he surrounded himself with men and women, Jews and Gentiles, fishermen and tax collectors, impulsives and cynics. He did nothing without God and the Spirit even they all seem to act differently in the world they were a tri-unity, a Godhead that only revealed mutual respect, love and care.

He preached one Lord, one faith, one Baptism. One people of God, one household of faith, one body. Difference and diversity yes, but always unity.

We should not be surprised as he prepares to depart earth that his prayer, his plea, his desire is that all his followers would be one. Be one just like he and God the creator are – two that can finish each other's work, that compliment each other, that are different, that love, that dwell in each other's company without competition. This is a vision of a world at peace, and how we need such a world.

Jesus' prayer and plea for unity is for us. It is for us on a local level, at an individual church and denominational level, at a state and national level. Unity in diversity. Later this morning we will have our annual general meeting and Jesus' words are for us in that context too. On a practical level it means we are all equal, each with our own contribution to make, each with something to say, each with a word of wisdom. Whether we have been here for ages or arrived just recently, whether we are theologically trained or not, whether we are articulate or not, whether we are sure of our faith or still have many questions, it is together that we are one. We don't have to agree but we do have to respect the ideas, dreams and visions of each other. We do have to listen to voices that are different from our own. We do have to love and share our thoughts. There is no room for cliques or talking behind another's back. And when we do that, then the world will know of the God whom we profess to adore.

If we can do it here in this little church community then those around us will see it and such unity will extend beyond these walls.

So let us commit to live the unity that Jesus calls for. Rather than requiring uniformity and sameness, let us continue to celebrate our differences. Let us get to know each other, be curious but also understanding of what is important to each of us. Let's have genuine relationships with each other, rather than a mere tolerance. Let's accept and forgive each other where that needs to happen. Let us truly be the people of God in this place. Amen.