

# ***The Wide Brown Land For Me***

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020 for Season Of Creation – Land)



## **1. God's Land**

- Genesis tells us that God created the heaven and the earth, said let there be light and God saw that the light was good. It was good. God saw the dry land and the seas and saw that it was good. God saw the vegetation, the trees, the fruit and the seed and saw that it was good. Later in this story after some disobedience God tells the people they will need to till the land, to care for the land.
- The Psalmist calls the earth and all on it to sing for joy.
- The writer to the Corinthian church reminds the people that earth and all in it are the Lords.
- I love the Australian landscape -its colour, its diversity, its magnificence, its terror. This thought came to me profoundly once when flying over the desert near Alice Spring at sunset that all I could do was drink in the landscape and recite in my head the words from Dorothea MacKellar that I had learnt at school – the wide brown land for me. At that moment I knew there was something about the Australian landscape that was in my blood.

I want to invite you to think about the land, either the Australian landscape or the land in the country of your birth.

- Where do you feel at home in the land?
- Where do you feel/see God's presence in the Land?
- For what in creation are you grateful?



## **2. Aboriginal Land**

- We cannot think about land in Australia without facing the issue of Land Rights in Australia. That might be a reflection for another day.
- This photo is of Albert Namitjira's house outside of Alice Springs. His house on his land at a time when indigenous people did not have rights to their own land. One of greatest landscape artists, who absolutely captured the desert landscape, if you put his paintings beside photos of this land you can barely tell the difference. In my grand-parents time, everyone had a reproduction of his work in their homes.
- Our indigenous brothers and sisters are intimately connected to their land, it is not so much that they own the land, rather that the land owns them. They are called to care for and protect their 'country', their land. That is why Rio Tinto blowing up Juukan Gorge is such a travesty.
- Glenn Loughrey<sup>1</sup>, an Anglican Priest in Melbourne who is also an indigenous man makes a number of points. He reminds us that when you speak to an indigenous person they will ask where you are from before your name, country comes first. He doesn't use the words tradition owners, rather he talks about continuing custodians as the role of an indigenous person is to restore the land and add benefit to it. One has a reciprocal relationship to the land, you care for it and it provides what you need. He says indigenous people don't look up rather they look down and around, such is their relationship to the land.

Again, I invite you to think about the land, either the Australian landscape or the land in the country of your birth.

- How do you think about your relationship to the land?

<sup>1</sup> From a seminar by SHA on Sept 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020.



### 3. Pa's Land

- This is a photo of my grandfather at a lookout above the township of Coleraine, the place of his birth. He came from a farming family who tilled and cleared land, who farmed and cared for dairy cows in a number of places. They all knew how hard it was to till the land, they knew how to cope with fire, droughts and floods. The land was in his blood, the time he came to the city to work he left shortly after to go back to the land. When he retired and moved to Geelong, he refused to buy a couple of houses, because they did not have enough green space around the house, he bought a house beside a park and spent his retirement growing orchids, dahlias and pruning fruit trees. The land was in his blood.

Again, I invite you to think about the land, either the Australian landscape or the land in the country of your birth.

- Where is your ancestral land?
- Spend a few moments thinking about and giving thanks for those places?

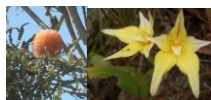


### 4. Destruction

- The next two pictures are from Western Australia, the Kalgoorlie Mine which I think is a mile long and a mile deep and a salt pan near Lake Grace in the wheatbelt. When I stood looking out into the mine, I was both fascinated and angry. Angry because a I wondered what we were doing to the earth as we mined it for some financial gain. Between Kalgoorlie and Perth the road is full of old gold mines and one house in particular which was split in two after an earthquake made me wonder what we were doing to God's earth.
- In the news this week we have heard politicians debating the blowing up of Juukan Gorge in the Kimberley's and the destruction of Koala habitat in New South Wales. But we can add to that – salination issues, deforestation to make way for houses.

Again, I invite you to think about the land, either the Australian landscape or the land in the country of your birth.

- How do you feel when you see God's creation being destroyed?
- Spend a moment or two praying for that



### 5. Signs of Hope

- There are signs of hope though:
- When we are off the road – we see clearer blue skies, we notice birds, plants etc that we have not seen before.
- Children striking and taking on the issue of protecting the earth into their own hands – striking, taking politicians to court, for, allowing the destruction of world they will inherit.
- Shareholders demanding change at Rio Tinto.
- We are gardening and composting
- We have an awareness of our carbon footprint and some are paying to offset this when they fly or buy goods.

Again, I invite you to think about the land, either the Australian landscape or the land in the country of your birth.

- What signs of hope to you see?
- What can you do to make a difference?

### 6. Conclusion

- God looked around and saw it was good
- Dorothea MacKellar penned a poem of love for her country
- My Pa loved the earth and needed to have green space around him to feel whole
- With the writer of the letter to the church in Corinth may we say – the earth and all in it is the Lord's, and we will live in a respectful relationship with it. Amen.