

Defiant Hope

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church January 26th, 2025 – Luke 4:14-21, 1 Cor 12:12-31)

I wonder if you saw or heard about the sermon given by Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde given at the Washington National Cathedral. In it she asked the newly inaugurated President Trump to show compassion and mercy. She asked him to have mercy upon the people who are scared. She noted they are gay, lesbian, transgender children, Democratic, Republican, independent families — some who fear for their lives,". She then reminded the congregation and Trump that it is these people who pick the crops, clean the buildings, work on poultry farms and who wash the dishes in restaurants, work in hospitals. They may not be citizens or have the right paperwork but they are not criminals, they pay tax and belong to churches, mosques, synagogues and temples, she continued. Children of immigrants fear that their parents will be taken away she said. She simply asked for him to show compassion, he of course belittled her, called her ungracious. Me, I think this woman should be praised, she clearly is following the footsteps of Jesus, not only was she gentle and gracious as she spoke, but she was also brave and showed defiant hope.

Our passage today from Luke's gospel is one of defiant hope. Jesus is back in his hometown and in the synagogue. As was normal practice, someone would stand, indicating their desire to read the Scripture and then they would sit and expound on what they had just read. A bit like sermon sports or sermons on the run. This is what Jesus appears to have done on this occasion. Reading from Isaiah, he asserts that that scripture – proclaiming freedom to the captives, restoring sight to the blind, proclaiming the year of God's favour was to be fulfilled in him. This is the ministry that Jesus will exercise in both word and deed. The nature of Jesus' ministry is in the terms of the quote from Isaiah: - to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom to the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. This is Jesus' statement of defiant hope. This is also my favourite bible passage, it has been my inspiration for the last 40 years, it is Jesus' manifesto and as a follower of Jesus it is my calling too, it sums up how I understand ministry and faith and has been my guiding light. It is my statement of defiant hope. Today we mark Aboriginal Sunday, a day called for by William Cooper, Pastor Doug Nicholls back in 1938, for churches to pray for the plight of Aboriginal people. It marked the beginning of many acts of defiant hope made by indigenous people in this country, many of which were led by Christians living out their faith.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.

Let me share with you some of those acts.¹

In 1939, indigenous people in NSW on the Cummeragunia Station walked off the property because they were being treated badly, all aspects of their lives were controlled and their children were being taken away or forced to become servants. As they walked off they sang a hymn that had been translated into their language, the hymn 'Turn Back Pharaoh's Army', a song based on the story of the Israelites fleeing slavery and oppression in Egypt. A song of faith in God and hope for the future.

¹ This material taken from Common Grace Aboriginal Sunday 2025 resources.

In 1965, Charles Perkins, an indigenous student at Sydney University led the 15 day 'Freedom Ride' which was designed to shed light on the racism experienced in rural New South Wales. You see, indigenous children were not allowed to use the public swimming pools and indigenous ex-servicemen were barred from the RSL.

In 1967, most of the Australian population acted with defiant hope when they voted to include indigenous people in census. Previously they had been counted as flora and fauna.

And there have been many other acts of defiant hope by indigenous people - Eddie Mabo seeking land rights, Vincent Lingari leading the walk off at Wave Hill, Nicky Winmar during an AFL match protesting the treatment of indigenous footballers, the building of the Tent Embassy in Canberra.

In 2025, our indigenous brothers and sisters ask us to take inspiration from these acts. and I would say also the American Bishop and Jesus himself. and raise our voice in defiant hope wherever we see injustice and people not being able to live their lives to the full.

Jesus stood up in the temple and read

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:18-21)

Paul continues the theme of defiant hope in our other reading from today. In age of increasing racism and rampant individualism, Paul offers us another way, another way following the footsteps of Jesus when he describes the church as one body.

For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. (1 Corinthians 12: 13-14)

This body analogy is also a statement of defiant hope. This is who we are – its in our DNA as Christians, we are called to look after one another, to treat each other with honour and respect, to suffer with each other and share in the joys of another.

This is the Jesus way, the way of love that Jesus sets out as he stood in the temple at the beginning of his ministry.

Our world is in great pain – conflicts rage, ceasefires are fragile, people seek asylum and are not welcomed, the creation and climate suffer, people are struggling to put food on the table and the rich get richer and more powerful at the expense of the 'ordinary person'.

How will you live with defiant hope in 2025?