

Can we go back from where we came from?

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 20 June, 2021

A Reflection by Aunty Pearl Wymarra

Pentecost 4B

An Australian First Nations reading: *The Coming of Light* by
Rev Canon Victor Joseph; Mark 4: 35-41

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

This year marks 150 years since the Missionaries from the London Missionary Society landed at Darnley in the Torres Strait. This year is also 154 years since two men Kenneth and Jagg, arrived in 1867 at Far Northern Cape York Peninsula, at Port Somerset, in the Land of the Gudang Aboriginal Clan. The Gudang people are my Paternal Grandmother's people. This is where the plan was seeded for the mission outreach to the Torres Strait Islanders. That is a "close the gap story" and God willing, I will be researching and writing it in the near future.

As I reflected on what to write, my mind recalled memories of my childhood with my father and mother, our community and my truths of growing up on Thursday Island with my parents as my first two best friends. I was the eldest daughter in a family of ten children, three boys and seven girls. Hence, I was a mother before I became one myself. I acknowledge with the greatest respect and heartfelt thanks to my parents for setting a firm foundation for my future by introducing me to Jesus when I was a child. Also for being the best role models of Jesus' teachings.

My parents were both raised on Christian Missions. Dad at Cowal Creek Anglican Mission, now known as Injinoo at the Far Northern Tip of Cape York Peninsula. Mum at Mapoon Presbyterian Mission on the Western Coast of Cape York, now known as Mapoon Shire Council. Mum also spent time with her parents as they worked with the Missionaries at Mornington Island and she also was a carer for the Missionaries children at Mapoon.

Mothers' parents were part of the stolen generation, with blood line stories of Aboriginal people connecting with Asia and Ireland. Dad grew up with his Gudang Aboriginal Clan. His father was a Scotsman of the McLaren Clan and when he moved away, he left Dad to grow up with his people. Grandfather Jack McLaren wrote a book about his life amongst the Gudang. It is called *My Crowded Solitude*. Dad trained to be an Anglican Priest but did not complete his training, instead became a Skipper of a pearling lugger, then a supply vessel for the Presbyterian Church called the "JG Ward" and delivered supplies from Thursday Island to their Presbyterian Missions at Mapoon, Aurukun, Weipa and Mornington Island.

He met Mum at Mapoon, they married, had three children at Mapoon, Ted, Ray and myself. We went to live on Thursday Island when I was a few months old and the rest of the seven children one boy and six girls were born on TI.

My Christian upbringing was in the Presbyterian Church on TI. Learning from the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church traditions, enhanced my Christian upbringing. I learnt the good and proper ways of the Muslim faith traditions, from the people who came from Indonesia and Malaya to work in the pearling industry on Thursday Island.

Later in my life, I learnt of the Bahai Faith and many other Faith groups that are operating in Australia. I travelled twice to Egypt where I learnt more about the Coptic Orthodox Church.

My knowledge and understandings of Faith groups were enhanced while working at the University of Western Sydney in the 90's. During that time I audited World Religions with Rev. William Emilsen, you can find out more on the Western Sydney University website, in a book called *the 21st Anniversary of the Yarramundi Lecture*. It has the story of what we did at the Hawkesbury Campus in the 1990's. When meeting with Bishops, Priests, Religious, Consecrated persons Seminarians and Catechists in Bagdad, Pope Francis said: "*The love of Christ, summons us to set aside every kind of self- centredness or competition; it impels us to universal communion and challenges us to form a community of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another.*" I whole heartedly agree with this especially in the context of Australia.

Back to where I've come from, this is the house I grew up in. This picture was taken by the Harbour Master, Captain McIlwraith who was also a member of our Presbyterian Church. Dad became the Coxswain for the Harbour Masters Launch the MV Waiben. He remained in this position for 30 years, until he passed away in 1975. Recent local research of old homes on TI found that our home was originally a hospital. It was built during the war by the army for the local Japanese people who came to our island before the war, to work in the pearling industry and set up their shops. This house was a safe place for them in times of sickness. It was run by the army and our parents bought it after the war.

Our family's rules were, that we must;

- Be servants of God
- Always Give God the Glory for all things great and small
- Show love to all people
- Show respect to our elders
- Share what we have
- Be humble at all times
- Care for each other
- Work as a team
- Act and speak in proper ways
- Obey our parents
- Praise each other
- Practise forgiveness



These family rules were not written on a poster in our house, it was our daily practise of the good and proper cultural ways, learnt from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture, our Christian Faith and from fellow Australians of Faith and Goodwill who came to work and live with us in those days.

In my times of grief and loss, or confusions in life, this house presents itself in my dreams. I often wonder is it because it is where I first saw the model of unconditional love, learnt ways of spontaneously responding to the needs of others and of sharing and caring. Is it because I long to go back to that time and I cannot physically go back there? This house is no more, another house stands in its place. The good news is, I am back there because my home is a studio unit, which I call my “modern day cave.”

I am reflecting and remembering how we survived in those days and how we helped many people in their times of need. Now by the grace of God, in my time of need, I am surrounded by old and young people, children and families of many cultures in our block of units. The peoples of the world are here and it reminds of my life on TI. Truly, the world has come to Penrith LGA and indeed Australia wide.

David Suzuki’s famous quote is “*think global, act local.*” In one of his presentations he encouraged us more, to “*think local and act local*”. I say “ditto” to that and the “local” starts with ourselves as individuals, our families and communities where ever we live, work or play. Let us all unearth the treasures. We are those treasures, in the tangled mess, of our own creations and making. Let us walk and work beside each other as we untangle the mess. Yet again, God’s alarm is sounding. The call has come for us to restore faith, hope, love, joy and peace in ourselves, our families and our communities.

I was privileged to work with Aboriginal men and boys in Parklea Correctional Centre some time ago. Even though it was only a couple of hours one day a week, I made the most of that time to encourage them to make the most of their time inside to heal from the inside. I encouraged them to write their stories and focus on the positive things that has happened in their lives. I shared stories and strategies that I learnt, since my childhood of how to navigate my way in amongst my tensions in my life. They related to my stories and found answers for theirs. Parklea put a story in the papers about the work I did there. The headline was that I transformed lives in Parklea. Others asked me what I did there, other than share my story. My reply was, I encouraged them to write theirs.

Friends, let’s genuinely, listen with our hearts to each other’s stories and hear the prompting of the Sacred Good Holy Spirit that will guide us to:

- willingly share our gifts and talents
- work in ways to spiritually heal each other
- reconcile and restore our communities of faith and goodwill
- create safe spaces in our homes and communities, to help us re-discover our relationship with God and safely share our cries from the heart
- be aware of ways of favouritism in our families
- respectfully listen to and learn from each other
- be more compassionate
- respect the role and place of our elders
- respect the important role and place of our youth and younger children
- be positive role models
- reflect and evaluate our lives

- follow God’s proposal of the good ways of love
- show and model it as the key to healing
- give each other hope, that true loving kindness will manifest in longer happier lives

Australia is known as the Great South Land of the Holy Spirit. Many Faith stories of Good Sacred Holy Spirits have been shared here in Australia, prior to and since 1788. An Aboriginal Elder in the early 1900s, Margaret Tucker, said before she was taken away from her family as a child, “*our people were like one big family*” (cited Lousy Little Sixpence.) Let’s reclaim the concept of family, we write songs and poems about it, our current slogan is, we are in it together. If we really are, then let’s action it.

Pope Francis warns, in his encyclical Fratelli tutti “*everyone has the right to live with dignity and unless this basic principal is upheld, there will be no future, either for fraternity or for the survival of humanity.*” During the Pandemic I did I two courses with the Church of Scientology. My spirit has been strengthened, I am living with dignity and now confidently studying part time for a Bachelor of Theology. L. Ron Hubbard said, “*The most valuable asset we have actually, is our ability to understand, to do the right thing, to be kind to be decent.*” (3/11/1955.)

Let’s show God we are standing with our “hands are up” and keep on keeping on doing Good.

John Wesley (1703-1791) wrote this poem about Goodness.

Do all the good you can.

Do all the good you can
 By all the means you can
 In all the ways you can
 In all the places you can
 At all the times you can
 To all the people you can
 As long as ever you can

As we do good, do it with “*love as the key.*” Rev. Gordon Dicker (RIP) Founder of “*With Love to the World*” recommended me to present the Aboriginal perspective at an event called “*Reading the Bible through the Eyes of the Marginalized.*” I chose John Chapter I verses 1-5 and substituted the word Love for “he, him and word” hence it reads’:

*In the beginning was the **love** and the **love** was with God and the **love** was God. 2. **Love** was in the beginning with God. 3. All things came into being through **love**, and without **love** not one thing came into being, what has come into being 4 in **love** was life and the life was the light of all people. 5. The Light shines in the darkness and the Darkness has not overcome it.* (Holy Bible with the Apocrypha)

I conclude with this story;

Before candles came to Australia, our campfires were our Christ Candles.

Aboriginal people, as we seasonally travelled our Country amongst our many Nations within Australia prior to 1788, we knew where the firewood would be in plentiful supply.

Hence this left us free to hunt and gather the food for the evening meal on the way to where we camped for the night. This campsite was also seasonal, hence within the boundaries of our Clan areas we had a regular campsite for each of the seasons, that is Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter.

Pitt Uniting Church is a Campfire site. The twigs were collected from this campsite and now Rev. Josephine and a couple of people will take a twig and place it around the Christ Candle. Let us ALL Pray for unity and harmony at this place. Also, I have brought 3 twigs (symbolic of the Trinity) from the pile gathered for our special stress less day at the Centre for Ministry at North Parramatta. Brendan Lukin, a student studying to be an Army Chaplin gathered them. Brendan is also two times Grand Nephew of Past President of the Uniting Church, Sir Ronald Wilson (RIP).

May God Bless All who work, rest, find compassion, care and comfort at this campsite. May we all work together in mutual respectful relationships as we support and enable each other as a Family of God to restore and grow the good fruits of the spirit. These good spirits are; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control within;

- Australian First Nations Countries, States, Territories and their peoples and communities
- World Wide Countries and their peoples and communities.

So, Friends...*"Can we go back from where we have come from?"*

My Heartfelt Answer is Yes!! God and People Willing, spiritually, we can and we will. What do you reckon?

May God continue to bless, guide and protect us on all our future pathways.

May these Pathways bring more; love, Joy and Peace in abundance and overflowing, always and forever.

I like writing new words to old tunes, let us now sing together Gods' Amazing Grace to the tune of Amazing Grace.