

# Sending out

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Luke 10:1-11

Rev J Shannon

Yiradhu marang! Wiradjuri for Good day!

Sadly, I don't know the Yuin words for hello as this language because I have no one to teach me.

The next 7 days are NAIDOC week. You might have forgotten that it stands for National Aboriginal and Islanders Day of Observance. It is a time set aside to celebrate our first nations' history and culture.<sup>1</sup>

I am constantly surprised by how little we know about our neighbours and at the same time delighted with what I see as significant changes in attitude and relationships. I'm going to spend a little time talking about my new understandings and then turn to the Luke readings and see where it sits in our consciousness.

The Yuin people numbered over 11,000 before settlement. (That's the same population as Merimbula and Tura beach today) They were a peaceful people and some cooperated with the whalers when they arrived. Sadly, as a result of this interaction, their population was decimated to less than 800 through smallpox and venereal diseases. When you spread 800 people thinly between Nowra and Eden – much is lost. Many of the traditional ceremonies are no longer celebrated and the rich Yuin language with 5 dialects began to disappear.

The first thing I've learned from 1<sup>st</sup> nations people is how insulting it is to talk *about* someone when they are not here. Every marginalized group from women to whole nations of indigenous people know what it is like for someone else to talk *about* them and make decisions about *their* welfare. We have seen this in our painful histories of stolen generations, enforced mission schools and financial control.

Now I must apologise. I tried to get Pastor Ozzie Cruize to talk to us today but he is tied up. We will hear from him at sometime but not today. Because we do not have any indigenous representatives here, I will only talk in generalities and not even pretend I know this community or what their concerns might be.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> You'll notice that the ABC and SBS are running programs that highlight indigenous talent.

<sup>2</sup> The only thing I know about this mob is that their spiritual animals are the Pacific Black Duck (Umbarra) and the Black Swan. I know that they could read the messages sent by the birds – especially the BooBook owls who would tell them when visitors were coming.

Did you know the [Eurobodalla Shire Council](#) signed a Local Agreement with the Northern Yuin people in 1998? And in 2001, the [Bega Valley Shire Council](#) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Bega, Eden and Merrimans Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Native Title Holders. Impressive. Times have changed.

And that leads me to the 2<sup>nd</sup> thing I've learned. NAIDOC week has had an impact. Our national consciousness *is* changing. Slowly, slowly. Have you noticed the ABC now subtitles all its reports with the name of the First Nations land from where the reporting is taking place? It slips into the subconscious. It is becoming 'normal'.

As our church has a covenant with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters in Christ, we committed to starting every service and every meeting naming and respecting the indigenous people of the land. It might have seemed strange at first but now it is normal and this has been a particularly useful part of our zoom meetings as it not only reminds us of our geographical distances and common goals but also our own diversity.

Many years ago, I was told about an Australian delegation to an international conference who, when asked to come up with a common symbol or costume to represent Australia, said we didn't have one.<sup>3</sup> Now a days, I don't think they would say that. More and more Australians are proud to come from a country with a continuous culture dating from more than 65,000 years ago. We might not *be* Aboriginal but we know where we come from. What most don't understand is that this is a fundamental shift from settlers owning the land to the land owning all of us. It is a different mindset. Proud of **the** history not our history alone. Proud of black history.

And that is another thing I have learned from talking to first nations people (here and overseas) that we have to own our history: Each, individual and collectively. All cultures have a way of sanitising what they are embarrassed about. Most Americans never learned about 'The Indian Wars' or what happened after Thanksgiving. We have been guilty of not teaching the real history of settlement. Knowing our history does not make us less.

I remember when I first came to Australia – no one, and I mean no-one, admitted to convict blood in their family lines. The Shannon family myth (as it was with so many others) was the daughter of the manor ran away with the

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<sup>3</sup> The only Aboriginal delegate put them straight. They were embarrassed that it hadn't crossed their minds.

gardener.<sup>4</sup> Now convict blood is an accepted point in our history and even a point of pride for some. That means we accept the good and the bad.

No one's ancestors are perfect. They held cultural beliefs and prejudices of their times. What my indigenous teachers have told me is that I must own them. I have to know where I come from. I have to understand how my ancestry shapes my beliefs, influences my manners and my decision-making. I have to know the good and the bad, the right and the wrong and know, like it or not, this is my blood line. Then I can consciously alter my responses.

This is because from an indigenous mindset, two people cannot come to a table for reconciliation when one does not know who they are.

This is the way it was done traditionally. A person from another language group would come to the edge of a homeland and asks to be admitted. The elders would go out to the meeting place, sit down with this person and grill them on who they were, who were their families, what land did they come from, what was their spirit animal and more<sup>5</sup>. If the elders believed they *knew* this person as a result of a long conversation (which could take days) and so knew this person did not want to do harm to the land or the people, they would be trusted with entry or passage through.

It was the same process whether you are Australian Aboriginal or American Lakota: meet the stranger at the edge and get to know them.

This took time. Now perhaps you can understand why it has been so traumatic for an Indigenous person to *not* know their mob. Thousands and thousands of years of tradition are in the DNA. We have cultural memory, generational synopsis that can leave a person feeling 'un-whole' even though they may not know why. Adopted children often have the same 'hole' in the soul. It is a drive to know their people even though they may have had a wonderful, loving life in their adopted family. They do not love them less but they need to know who they are.

We have not always come to the table willing to share our wounds and the wounds of our ancestors. We have not always come to the table willing to learn a few words of another's language or an understanding of their culture...yet,

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<sup>4</sup> The 1988 Centenary Irish data base gift to the national library shows the Shannon line comes from white collar criminals

<sup>5</sup> Recognising that spiritual animals/totems influence thinking and behaviour because they are your ancestors

we expect it of the other. Reconciliation can only happen when both parties are open.

And so, I turn to Luke's passage...

This is a troubling passage for me because it distinctly describes the difference between a priest and a deacon.

In this passage, Luke has Jesus say, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'

Traditionally, this means ask God and he will provide. But the passage also reduces humans to a resource, a commodity to be reaped like wheat. It ignores the human communities they are moving through.

I had a dream while I was away, that I worked for Uniting and I fired the head of HR and renamed the department, "vulnerable assets". It is a different world view from sending lambs to the wolves. If your assumption is a hostile environment where people are to be harvested – then there is a lack of awareness and respect for the other.

Later in the passage, it says 'Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages.'

The good news is you do not have to stay Kosher – the bad news is there is a sense of entitlement that grates on me.

A priest sees himself as a worker for God and is entitled to be fed. They may see themselves as deserving, with a sense of purpose but it would not occur to them to ask permission. A deacon would have gone out into the fields and hewn and sown with the people and once invited, would have eaten with a family...but not stayed beyond their capacity. So, to a deacon, the instruction 'do not move from house to house' would not share the burden fairly and might exploit the generosity of one host.

It is from this passage that modern priests assume they will eat at the table of their parishioners. A Deacon makes no such assumption.

And then there is the rejection. "Whoever rejects you, rejects me. Whoever rejects me, rejects Him who sent me." That is a heavy burden on the people and does not describe the process I talked about earlier of getting to know

each other; of respecting culture and history to find common ground. It is a win/lose, 'with us' or 'against us' proposition.

I point this out, not as a criticism of Luke. This text is a product of its time. I point this out to demonstrate how texts are part of our history and understanding and therefore have flavoured relationships and negotiations ever since. We think like this because it is part of our cultural history.

And now we see it played out in American politics and they have no idea why they think that way. "If you do not believe in what I believe then are my enemy."

Modern theologians and bible scholars read God's words between the lines and in the Lord's actions but for literalists, unwilling to contextualise ancient writings, the message was clear. Historically, it gave kings and queens permission to colonise, displace, repress, re-educate, ban languages, starve and enslave. Fragments of these understandings still dwell in our collective conscious.

But our eyes are open. Australia is beginning to come to the table with a new respect of how the land owns us. Collectively, we are claiming our history and see how settlement sits within a long history of our peoples. And individually, we are reclaiming our ancestry so that we can sit at the table sharing our wounds and talents and with a new understanding of what shapes us.

When we take the scriptures as a whole, we can clearly see God's plan for the reconciliation of all things. NAIDOC 2022's theme is 'get up, stand up, show up' - Not all that different from the sending out - but it is... because we're different.

Amen