



IMA CHURCH RESOURCE KIT

Reconciliation Week

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Introductory notes

Each year National Reconciliation Week is held from 27 May to 3 June. It celebrates two significant dates in the national reconciliation journey: the 1967 referendum and the High Court Mabo decision. National Reconciliation Week provides an opportunity to learn more ‘about our shared histories, cultures, and achievements.’¹ ‘Reconciliation means a change in hearts, minds and actions as Australians to build a ‘nation strengthened by respectful relationships between the wider Australian community, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’².

As Christians we are a people who are reconciled and reconciling: reconciled to God, each other and within ourselves; and we are agents of reconciliation in the world. As such we have a pivotal role to play in the reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. We also have spiritual resources for the task that are found in the New Testament. This sermon resource aims to invite us all into the process of reconciliation by looking at the biblical understanding—and process of—reconciliation.

Please find some additional resources around these ideas, and make this sermon your own. Add in your own illustrations that will connect with the specific group of people you are speaking to. You have a better understanding of the specific issues that members of your congregation might have with this content. So please, adapt and add in any extra material that will help the message to be truly transformational.

¹ <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/national-reconciliation-week/>

² Ibid.



Sermon Notes

Introduction

The history of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians can only be described as difficult, dysfunctional and ultimately framed by a lack of love. The ways in which the British settlers and their descendants treated Aboriginal people was from the first contact violent, disrespectful and sinful. James Cook's diary of first meeting two Aboriginals, reports that when their attempts to give gifts to the men failed, they opened fire on them, injuring one. This was the beginning of what has been an oppressive and brutal relationship—completely at odds with the heart of God, and of His explicit instructions that we are to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Over the following years the relationship was marked by attempted genocide, attempts to 'breed out the black', rape, theft of land, withholding of wages, withholding of freedom, removal of children... etc... The list goes on. Even in more recent years where there have been attempts to improve issues such as the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancies, often the government has acted in an autocratic and paternalist way attempting to impose measures without consultation or engagement with the Indigenous community. The relationship is still fundamentally unbalanced. It is almost disingenuous to call it a relationship at all, since the word 'relationship' usually has a positive connotation. Meanwhile the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous Australia is dysfunctional, characterised by abuses and might better be described as "enmity"

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As Christians we are a people who are reconciled and reconciling: reconciled to God, each other and within ourselves; and we are agents of reconciliation in the world. As such we have a pivotal role to play in the reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. We also have spiritual resources for the task that are found in the New Testament. So let's take a look at the way the bible talks about reconciliation and see the invitation the God has laid in front of us to work towards reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Transformation of Relationship

The NT Greek word in Romans 5:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:18 that gets translated as 'reconciled' (καταλλάσσειν), signifies a transformation of relationship.⁴ This transformation is the 'basis of the most comprehensive renewal possible for humanity, namely, that we have become new creatures, that old things have passed away and that all things have become new. In Rom. 5:10, too, it denotes an incisive change... There is a change, not merely in the disposition of a person or their legal relationship to God, but in the total state of their life.'⁵ There is a change of heart which leads to a complete change of life. Changes in behaviour follow the transformation of the relationship between God and people.

This understanding of reconciliation is useful, as it highlights that what needs changing is not some ethereal relationship 'thing' between two parties, but rather the change is inward. It is a change of heart, it is a change of beliefs and attitudes, and results in various changes in behaviour. Reconciliation to God actually makes us a new creation, and the whole of life is changed because of it. Who we are is fundamentally changed and the way we relate to God is fundamentally changed.

⁴ Büchsel, F. (1964–). ἀλλάσσω, ἀντάλλαγμα, ἀπ-, δι-, καταλλάσσω, καταλλαγὴ, ἀποκατ-, μεταλλάσσω. G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, & G. Friedrich (Eds.), *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed., Vol. 1, p. 255). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

⁵ Ibid - Edited.

Former Enemies Become Family

The biblical picture of our reconciliation to God is of us being transformed from being at complete enmity with God to becoming family. Romans 5:10 describes us as 'God's enemies' at the time when we were reconciled to Him 'through the death of his Son'. Romans 8:7 describes the pre-saved state as 'hostility to God'. Jesus described this as being 'children of the devil' (John 8:44).

After being reconciled to God the biblical language shifts to describing us as God's family. 'God's spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory' Romans 8:16-17.

Reconciliation then is about being adopted into family. God becomes our Father, and by extension his other kids become our brothers and sisters. So our reconciliation to God provides the basis for the reconciliation of people across all boundaries. 'So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith... There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' Galatians 3:26-28.

This is the specific spiritual resource that we as Christians have to contribute to the national reconciliation process: we are His ambassadors of reconciliation.'...God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ... gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God' 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. And as we have seen, reconciliation with God spills over into reconciliation between people.




Biblical Process of Reconciliation

The biblical process of reconciliation involves repentance, forgiveness and sacrifice. Let's look at these elements and how they might relate to the reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia.

In order to be reconciled to God we have to acknowledge that our sin has separated us from God. We have to face up to the facts and be honest, no matter how we might feel doing so. One of the first instinctive ways we normally handle sin is to ignore it and/or make excuses for it. Actually facing up to it exposes our feelings of shame which we would usually much prefer to stuff down and ignore. Repentance means facing all of that and actually dealing with it. It means being honest about our sin. It means turning around and changing not only our outward behaviour but also the thoughts, attitudes and mindsets that have rationalised our sin. It means not continuing on in the practice of sin.

One of the big problems that thwarts the reconciliation process in Australia is that non-Indigenous people do not want to face the truth and repent. The reality is that the prosperity of non-Indigenous Australia is stolen goods. What we have is a direct result of British colonisation. This is the state of affairs for the descendants of the British colonisers but also the other migrant groups that have come since. All have profited from the mistreatment of Aboriginal people. We don't like to admit it because it challenges the idea that 'Aussies are good blokes' and that we believe in the 'fair go' etc. We don't want to face the fact that we are in receipt of stolen goods that were extracted from Aboriginal people through the most horrific of means.



We like to make excuses like British colonisation wasn't as oppressive as other regimes might have been. But that is like Adam blaming Eve, it's blame shifting and an attempt to maintain our sense of self-righteousness. The model of biblical repentance means we need to face up to the reality and deal with our national sin.

Secondly, biblical reconciliation requires forgiveness. Having repented we can receive forgiveness. It takes great bravery on the part of the person giving forgiveness to do so. As in any situation of abuse, forgiveness does not necessarily mean giving the abuser full trust. It is simply letting go of their sin against you so that you can start to negotiate a way forward. It takes guts to decide not to hold sin against someone who has hurt you. Likewise it takes humility to receive forgiveness. You have to let go of your self-righteousness and agree that what you did was sinful.

For Australia, the issue around forgiveness is that many of the hurts are ongoing, and it's difficult to forgive when you are still being hurt. And so, forgiveness in this situation will take great bravery and wisdom. The other issue is that many non-Indigenous Australians would not believe that they need to receive forgiveness. A humility to receive forgiveness will be required.

The reconciliation between God and humanity required Christ's sacrifice. Simply put, reconciliation always comes at a cost. In the reconciliation between God and humanity, God paid the whole price. However, usually there are some reciprocal costs involved. There is always a laying down of something in order to transform a broken relationship.

For non-Indigenous Australians there will be a cost in privilege. Those things that have made our lives more comfortable at the expense of Aboriginal people will need to be laid down. We will have to look at what true justice means. It might mean compensation, it might mean changes to acknowledge Aboriginal sovereignty. At a minimum it will take humility and repentance.



Conclusion

From this platform of biblical reconciliation there is the possibility of building a new Australia. One that acknowledges and celebrates the various groups that make up our nation: Indigenous, Anglo-Saxon Australians and the various other migrant groups who call Australia home.

A reconciled Australia could become a picture of what God's kingdom looks like: people united across ethnic boundaries, people brought together by forgiveness and love, people who are brave enough to face the truth of our history to forge a new future. a future characterised by hope not despair, where the life expectancy gap is removed; where there is no longer a disproportionate amount of indigenous people imprisoned; where the wealth gap has been removed. And where a generation of nonindigenous people can finally say that we have truly done what needs to be done to make amends for our history. And where we can stand together at peace, truly thankful for one another and how we each contribute to that greater picture of what it means to be Australian.

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