

EPIPHANY 6

Year C

Larissa Minniecon, a proud Kabi Kabi, Gureng Gureng, Australian South Sea Islander, and Zenadth Kes woman lives, works, and dreams on Gadigal Land. A recent graduate of the master's program in narrative therapy and community work from the University of Melbourne, she weaves stories of healing and hope in her work. A deeply respected emerging Christian leader, Larissa carries over 20 years of experience working in community development and Indigenous health across remote, rural, and urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As the truth-telling and reconciliation missionary for the Anglican Board of Mission, Australia, and an Indigenous emergency relief worker with St. John's Anglican Church, Glebe, Larissa dedicates her ministry to reconciliation and hope, nurturing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and families. She also helps lead Scarred Tree Indigenous Ministries and chairs the Glebe NAIDOC Committee, bringing her community together with a deep commitment and cultural celebration. A sought-after speaker, consultant, and educator, Larissa's voice carries far and wide, inspiring change and connection.

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Jeremiah 17:5-10

⁵ Thus says the Lord:

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals
and make mere flesh their strength,
whose hearts turn away from the Lord.

⁶ They shall be like a shrub in the desert
and shall not see when relief comes.

They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.

⁷ Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,
whose trust is the Lord.

⁸ They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.

It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

⁹ The heart is devious above all else;
it is perverse—
who can understand it?

¹⁰ I the Lord test the mind
and search the heart,
to give to all according to their ways,
according to the fruit of their doings.

Commentary from Larissa Minniecon

“You lied to us. You gave us false hope. You told us that the future was something to look forward to. And the saddest thing is that most children are not even aware of the fate that awaits us. We will not understand it until it's too late. And yet we are the lucky ones. Those who will be affected the hardest are already suffering the consequences. But their voices are not heard.”

— Greta Thunberg, climate activist, from a 2019 excerpt of a speech to the British Parliament

Jeremiah 17:5-10 warns of the consequences of trusting in human strength and turning away from God. It states, “Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord.” This passage highlights the senselessness of relying solely on human wisdom without grounding our actions in God's will. Greta Thunberg's words on climate change echo Jeremiah's prophecy. The “false hope” she describes reflects misplaced trust in systems prioritizing short-term gains over long-term care for creation. This disregard for responsibility reveals a disconnection from God's call to stewardship and justice.

Jeremiah compares the cursed to barren bush in the wasteland and those who are blessed with the tree planted by water, symbolizing the difference between separation from God and a life rooted in him. Likewise, humanity's neglect of creation has led to barren lands, rising seas, and suffering, especially among the most vulnerable—those whose cries for help often go unheard. Jeremiah reminds us that God examines the heart and rewards deeds. Our environmental crisis calls for an honest evaluation of our actions and our Christian calling to Creation Justice. As stewards of God's creation, we must act with justice and

compassion. Aligning our efforts with God's will can restore hope and healing for all generations.

Discussion Questions

Where have you placed your trust in addressing local, national, and global issues like climate justice – on human systems and temporary solutions, or on God's guidance and principles of Climate Justice? (read Gen 2:15, Ps 24:1, Lev 25:23-24, Isa: 24:4-5, Rom 8:19-21, Mic 6:8, Rev 11:18)

How can you actively respond to the cries of this generation, who are suffering the most from environmental consequences? Whose are the voices that you need to hear? Indigenous? Young people or elders?

Psalm 1

1 Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, *
nor lingered in the way of sinners,
nor sat in the seats of the scornful!

2 Their delight is in the law of the Lord, *
and they meditate on his law day and night.

3 They are like trees planted by streams of water,
bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do
not wither; *
everything they do shall prosper.

4 It is not so with the wicked; *
they are like chaff which the wind blows away.

5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand upright
when judgment comes, *
nor the sinner in the council of the righteous.

6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, *
but the way of the wicked is doomed.

Commentary from Larissa Minniecon

"For Aboriginal leaders, the social and moral obligation that comes with community leadership is life-long. Those who lead, who have authority, must care for and look after those who come behind."

- Patrick Dodson, former Aboriginal senator of Australia, 2016 - 2024

Psalm 1 paints a vivid picture of the life of the righteous and contrasts it with the way of the wicked. We can view leadership in the same manner, as it portrays the righteous as "like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season." This resonates deeply with the Aboriginal worldview, particularly in the context of former Senator Patrick Dodson's reflection on leadership. Dodson emphasizes the life-long moral obligation of leaders to nurture and protect their communities, ensuring the well-being of future generations. The righteous person delights in God's law and meditates on it day and night; their actions are rooted in wisdom and sustained by a life-giving source, enabling leaders to provide stability and growth for those around them. Like a tree's roots anchoring it firmly, a leader's connection to the divinity of God's law, their cultural identity, and community enables us to care for others selflessly.

But leadership in wickedness is often driven by self-interest, power, and greed; it disregards the wellbeing of others, is short-sighted, and is unstable. Wicked leadership leads to instability and division, and eventually fails the community with long-term consequences, as in verse 4: "They are like chaff which the wind blows away." They lack a firm foundation and cannot withstand challenges or judgment. Wickedness erodes trust and brings harm.

Dodson's call to care for those who come behind parallels Psalm 1's emphasis on living a life that nurtures collective prosperity; we are many trees planted by streams of water. This reflection invites us to consider leadership as an act of custodianship—grounded in faith, with a profound responsibility rooted in care, safeguarding land, culture, tradition, and knowledge, sustained by wisdom, and aimed at nurturing both individuals and communities and the future generations to come – this is collective prosperity.

Discussion Questions

In what ways does your role as a custodian – whether of relationships, community, church life, or the environment – reflect a commitment to the values of Psalm 1?

How can you cultivate a leadership style that embodies the characteristics of the "trees planted by streams of water" in Psalm 1 – ensuring your leadership is an act of custodianship?

How can you recognize and address signs of wickedness in leadership? How do we safeguard the collective to ensure prosperity for all?

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

15 Now I want you to understand, brothers and sisters, the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ² through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

³ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures ⁴ and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you believed.

Commentary from Larissa Minniecon

“That the Gospel did not come as Good News for Aboriginal people, but rather came as bad news, was due to the notion held by Missionaries that all of Aboriginal Culture was demonic. Thus began a Ministry of oppression and degradation, in trying to turn Aboriginal people into White folk. So, today the Christian faith of Aboriginal people is endeavouring to Aboriginalise the Gospel and Christian teaching.”

- *Bishop James Leftwich, from Christian Faith and Aboriginal Culture, National Council of Churches in Australia*

As people of faith, we hold this tension of the resurrection as an anchor to our Christian faith, proclaiming that without Christ’s resurrection, faith is futile and humanity remains in sin. The Apostle Paul’s writing challenges believers to recognize the transformative power of the Gospel, but how is this message being shared and received across others and cultures?

Bishop James Leftwich’s words shed light on the historical tension between the Christian faith and our experience as Indigenous people and Aboriginal culture. Missionaries, in their colonial mindset, often misrepresented the Gospel by framing Aboriginal traditions and identity as inherently demonic. This injustice opposes the gift of transformative justice we inherit in the resurrection of Christ, which restores and redeems all creation. Today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christians are reclaiming their faith by “Aboriginalising” the Gospel, ensuring it speaks to our unique experiences through a cultural lens. This act of resistance and restoration demonstrates the Gospel’s true purpose – a message of hope, liberation, and justice. The church must confront its complicity in oppression and injustice; it must embody a faith that upholds transformative justice and true reconciliation.

Discussion Questions

How does the resurrection of Christ challenge us to confront systems of oppression and embody a faith that brings restoration and dignity for all?

In what ways can we ensure that the resurrection and faith are shared and lived out in ways that honor justice and truth-telling for marginalized and oppressed communities?

Luke 6:17-26

¹⁷ He came down with them and stood on a level place with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸ They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. ²⁰ Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ “Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²² “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³ Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

²⁵ “Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶ “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Commentary from Larissa Minniecon

“There are places in the churches where, because I am a woman, I am not allowed to speak or lead. In my diocese, in most places this is not the case. It can be a covert discrimination in lots of places and even sadly amongst women who have been conditioned to do this as well. As an Aboriginal person there is even more suspicion and anxiety, because when I include Aboriginal objects or Aboriginal spiritual thoughts people feel threatened.”

- *The Rev. Canon Aunty Di Langham, director of reconciliation in the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle, from Common Grace*

This passage calls for radical inclusivity and solidarity with those on the margins, a vision of God’s upside-down kingdom, where the poor, hungry, weeping, and excluded are blessed. We also challenge societal discourses; we must continue to affirm God’s justice by uplifting the marginalized and oppressed while warning the privileged, for they will be cursed.

The Rev. Canon Aunty Di Langham describes this ongoing struggle for inclusion within the church. Her words highlight the double standard faced by women, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, in spaces where their voices and cultural expressions are met with suspicion and anxiety. Her statement echoes the exclusion Jesus addresses, where societal structures marginalize those deemed as “other.” This passage and Aunty Di’s reflection invite us to examine ourselves as Christians, challenging us to confront our complicity in systems that perpetuate inequality. As followers of Christ, we are reminded to embrace diverse voices and perspectives, to seek reconciliation and justice, and to embody the inclusive love of God’s Kingdom in our communities.

Discussion Questions

How can we align our hearts with Jesus’s vision of justice and inclusion as described in Luke 6:17 - 26?

How can you support and amplify the voices of those who feel silenced or marginalized, as Aunty Di Langham describes?