

Daily Scripture and Prayer Guide

Prayer for Reconciliation and Christian Unity 2006

Day 1 Friday, 26 May 2006

SORRY DAY

'I confess my iniquity; I am sorry...'
(Psalm 38:18)

Sorry

Reflection

This day is a time to acknowledge the pain and shame of Australian history and the sufferings of Indigenous People, to give thanks to God for the survival of Indigenous cultures, and to pray for the future of the nation. It is a day to join the psalmist in confessing iniquity, in saying sorry for both the personal and corporate wrongs of the past. Repentance is an essential purpose of this day, and so it is appropriate to remember that John the Baptist invited people to a baptism of repentance and that Jesus began his ministry with a call to 'repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand'. It is a choice of 'life' or of 'death' (as the Hebrew people knew) at the heart of what it means to live peaceably and in harmony with each other and with this land.



Scripture

Deut. 30:15-20 Then you shall live
Psalm 38 I confess my iniquity
Colossians 3:8-11 Clothed with the new self
Mark 1:4-5, 14-15 A baptism of repentance

Prayers

- Give thanks for the First Peoples of this land, for their cultures and unsurpassed antiquity
- Pray for grace to accept the realities of our history
- Pray for the Stolen Generations and the work of the Journey of Healing
- Pray for generosity to care for this land and waters and to share its resources justly, and
- For wisdom to build a better future for this nation.

Collect

Creator Spirit, forgive us our neglect in this country, and hear our prayer as we turn to you, that this nation may grow strong in rebuilding and nurturing connections to family, land and culture.

This resource for daily bible reading, reflection and prayer for reconciliation and Christian unity is based on the international material for the 2006 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which originated in work by an ecumenical group in Ireland. It has been adapted for use in Australia by the Faith and Unity Commission and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia.

Day 2 Saturday, 27 May 2006

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR RECONCILIATION BEGINS

'The ministry of reconciliation'
(2 Corinthians 5:18)

Reconciliation

Reflection

The gospel makes it clear that worship without reconciled relationships is impossible. The worshipper seeks peace and reconciliation, with God; but without reconciliation with the other person, communion with God is impossible. The clarity of this gospel truth defines the nature of the ministry of reconciliation given to all disciples of Christ. That ministry is, firstly, to witness that in Christ God's saving love touches and transforms human lives – reconciling us to God; but we live authentically in that state of reconciliation with God by being reconciled with our brothers and sisters. This means proclaiming and living the good news of deliverance, as both the psalmist and the prophet saw – to heal the broken-hearted, to restore the crushed in spirit. What does such a message say to our divided churches and to the nation as we begin the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation, inviting us to "take the next step" now?

Prayers

- Give thanks that some prejudices have softened and respect has grown
- Pray for humility and grace to put aside all prejudices and to grow in respect for one another
- Pray for grace and courage to take the next step towards reconciliation in Australia now
- Pray for the NCCA's National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission

Collect

Lord God, bring us together as one, reconciled with you and reconciled with each other, that your love may be the foundation on which we build our families and our nation. Gather us all into the healing grace of your reconciliation

Day 3 Sunday, 28 May 2006

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY BEGINS

'One Lord, one faith, one baptism'
(Ephesians 4:5)

Gathering

Reflection

The scriptures stress that God's will is for the unity of God's people. Through Ezekiel, God affirms that two divided, often estranged kingdoms, will again be one.

Scripture

Ezekiel 37:15-28	I will gather my people
Psalm 67:	Let all the peoples praise you
Ephesians 4:1-6	One Lord, one faith, one baptism
Matthew 28:16-20	Make disciples of all nations

God's cleansing presence will strengthen and bless them in a covenant of peace.

The natural response to God's gift of unity is our gratitude and praise. The psalmist calls upon all the nations to unite in praise to God, whose saving power may be seen in all nations and throughout the whole world.

Jesus commanded his disciples to go to all people to gather all nations into one. In baptism we have the paradox of an essential unity, a binding to Christ, yet at the same time we have to work hard at becoming what we are: the one people of God. That common belonging – to Christ and to one another – makes us one, despite all our differences of history, culture and theological conviction. Where two or three are gathered in Christ's name he is there in the midst, the focus, the pivot of unity.

Prayers

- Give thanks to God for setting us on the path to unity
- Pray for Amnesty International on its anniversary today, and for all prisoners of conscience
- Pray for the churches in Australia and for the unity of all Christians
- Pray for the National Council of Churches in Australia, state ecumenical councils, and the WCC

Collect

Grant, O God, that by our common commitment to you, and our one faith in Christ, we may recognise your presence and grow more and more into unity with each other. Make us truly one, Lord God.

Day 4 Monday, 29 May 2006

'You also ought to wash one another's feet'
(John 13:14)

Community

Reflection

Isaiah's call to assemble around the one God reminds us of the order God envisaged in creation. The psalmist expresses the overflowing joy of togetherness: unity is attractive. Jesus' emphasis on community is constant. Washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus left us a specific example of Christian behaviour towards our neighbour. In a letter to the Corinthians, Paul, writing of the need to care for each other, adds the fact that in the Holy Spirit everyone is different, although part of the same body. We are therefore created to seek the good of each other and to live in harmony with one another, hearing and honouring others of diverse thinking. The call to serve and not to count the cost urges us to take seriously our quest for unity that the world may believe, and that we might be of service in the world. To wash the feet of our sisters and brothers is more than a simple gesture; it is opening our heart in faithfulness to Jesus who bids us to serve the one church and the one world.

Scripture

Isaiah 45:8-21	Assemble yourselves and come together
Psalms 133	Kindred living together in unity
1 Cor. 12:12-31	All rejoice together
John 13:12-20	Whoever receives the one I send, receives

Prayers

- Give thanks for the diversity of peoples, languages and cultures, especially in Australia
 - Pray for renewed enthusiasm in building community
 - Pray for respect and harmony across racial diversity in Australia
 - Pray for the churches in the Middle East and the Middle East Council of Churches; and in Australia, for those who find their home in the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Assyrian Church of the East.
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Collect

Glorious God, help us to see your face in all whom we meet, and to live, with them, in the image of your Son, so that together we may enter into new life in community.

Day 5 Tuesday, 30 May 2006

Pray

'The Lord waits to be gracious to you'
(Isaiah 30:18)

Scripture

Isaiah 30:18-26	God will be gracious to you
Psalms 136	God's steadfast love endures forever
Acts 1:12-14	Together in prayer
Matthew 18:15-20	Prayer in Jesus' name

Reflection

Gathering together for prayer, as a single worshipping community, despite differences on the human plane, is a consistent theme of the Bible. In the early church, communities gathered to worship and praise God, to seek God's forgiveness and to intercede for God's mercy and help. The graciousness of God is revealed even more in the fact that God is a God of justice, and our prayers are responses to that justice. Throughout the Bible the character of God is revealed as gracious, patient, redeeming love. Isaiah speaks of it, and the psalmist insists it endures for ever. This is the context for the 'disciplinary procedure' spelt out in Matthew. A brilliant technique for restoring relationships, it begins with gentle, discreet discipline, aimed always at reconciliation with the community. Jesus assures the Church that its discerning, prayerful, decisions will be those of heaven. We need to ask ourselves how close we are to being united in prayer, life and work. The apostle exhorts us to pray without ceasing that the Holy Spirit may fall afresh upon us in our diversity and unite us.

Prayer

- Give thanks for God's unbounded love and forgiveness
- Pray for the freedom to understand and to forgive as lavishly as God
- Pray for Indigenous Christians in their ministries
- Pray for the churches of Aotearoa-New Zealand and the Pacific; for the Pacific Conference of Churches; and in Australia, for those who find their home in the Churches of Christ and the Congregational Federation.

Collect

Profligate God, you invite us to imitate you in generous forgiveness; as the disciples were united in their hearts, so may we be one in our faith, love and service, celebrating difference, rejoicing in diversity and willingly sharing the riches of our patterns of prayer.

Day 6 Wednesday, 31 May 2006

'Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times'
(Matthew 18:22)

Forgive

Reflection

Acknowledgement of the sins of the past, the grace of forgiveness and reconciliation are the recurrent themes in these readings. Jonah's call – addressed to the whole city – challenges the people of Nineveh to be honest in confessing their self-centredness, their disregard for goodness and their acts of violence. Both in the Australian society and in the mutual relations between our Christian communities there are traces of a past marked by human frailty and sin. Some wounds are healing, others are still the source of pain and division. Facing up to the past can be difficult and require sincere soul searching, for individuals and communities. The trouble is, we keep score and are too ready to throw the first stone. The challenge is to forget 'forgiveness-calculations', drop the rocks, and witness instead the infinite mercy of God. Pardon cannot be measured. It is as inexhaustible as the love of God: as much as seventy time seven. In their ecumenical journey – building unity between them and justice in society – our Christian communities are called to witness to God's mercy in its infinity.

Scripture

Jonah 3	Nineveh repents
Psalms 51	A plea for mercy
Colossians 3:12-17	Clothe yourself with love
John 8:1-11	Neither do I condemn you

Prayer

- Give thanks for God's inexhaustible love and forgiveness
- Pray for the courage to hold back hurt and hold out healing
- For recognition of the sins of our history and healing of memories of Aboriginal & Torres Strait peoples
- For the churches in Asia and the Christian Conference of Asia; and in Australia, for those who find their home in the Roman Catholic Church

Collect

Reconciling God, help us to overcome the grievances and bitterness which the failings and sins of the past have built up in us, and to seize the day for forgiveness.

Day 7 Thursday, 1 June 2006

'The Lord is with us'
(Psalm 46)

Peace

Reflection

The God of peace, the 'God of surprises', shocks us continually by the manner of the divine presence. In these scriptures, God comes in silence and reconciliation, not in thunder and war. God's peaceful and

Scripture

1 Kings 19:1-13a	Sound of sheer silence
Psalms 46	God is with us
Acts 10:9-48	God shows no partiality
Luke 10:25-37	Who is my neighbour?

comforting presence is to be found in the whisper of a gentle breeze or even in sheer silence. The Acts episode invites us to reflect on the Spirit at work throughout the world. In the image of an impartial God, we learn to go beyond all too human frontiers. Within the new community of Christ, God's Spirit raises up disciples regardless of nation, race or language. It may be the mistrusted stranger who embodies God's presence amongst us. The familiar gospel parable reminds us that we cannot look away when we come across a sister or brother – or another church community – in need.

Prayer

- Give thanks to God, who surprises us and overturns our expectations
- Pray that we may be open to God's new ways, bringing peace to our chaos and making enemies into friends
- Pray for deeper commitment to end the violence suffered by Indigenous communities, and
- For the churches of Europe and the Conference of European Churches; and in Australia, for those who find their home in the Lutheran and Uniting Churches

Collect

Surprising God, revealed in Jesus, make us attentive to your presence in the world, and help us to discern your leading in our ecumenical pilgrimage. All honour and glory be to you, for ever. Amen.

Day 8 Friday, 2 June 2006

'The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few'
(Luke 10:2)

Mission

Scripture

Daniel 3:19-30	Witnessing for faith
Psalms 146	In praise of God
Acts 8:26-40	Philip witnesses to the Ethiopian
Luke 10:1-12	Jesus sends out the disciples

Reflection

We are called by God to be a missionary people. The courageous and united witness by the three young men in Daniel was powerful and effective. The psalmist sang the praises of God who reaches out to people in different circumstances. Philip reflected the enthusiasm of the early church. He capitalised on every opportunity that presented itself to fulfil the mission of Jesus. Like the seventy, we are required to be courageous, moving beyond our comfort zones, to be inspired and inspiring. The message of the gospel is always stronger when Christians are united in common witness to its truth. Our common faith motivates us to seek ways of sharing the courage and compassion of Jesus in alleviating suffering in our world. Together we can be a powerful and effective movement for reconciliation and for the whole of God's mission in the world, to which we are called.

Prayer

- Give thanks for those who take risks in faith
- Pray for renewed enthusiasm in our common witness
- Pray for a continuing revival of culture, language and lore in the faith expression of Indigenous Christians
- Pray for the churches of Africa and the All Africa Conference of Churches; and in Australia, for those who find their home in the Salvation Army and Society of Friends.

Collect

Encouraging God, in calling us together in love, grant us the grace to be steadfast in our work for reconciliation and our search for unity, which reflects your glory. Amen.

Day 9 Saturday, 3 June 2006

MABO DAY

'Truly, I tell you, you did it to me'
(Matthew 25:40)

P resence

Reflection

The Hebrew tradition tells us that God is revealed in a burning bush, showing that everything is charged with 'Godness' and in graced moments we glimpse it. This is no distant, uncaring God, but a personal presence who is concerned with us. The psalmist stresses that God crowns all human beings with glory. Jesus makes plain that to persecute others is to persecute him, to serve others even by the gift of a cup of water, is to serve him. We must remember that Christ is in the 'other', not least when we encounter people of different cultural or racial backgrounds or of different church traditions. We are challenged to recognise his presence, to be open and courageous, as we travel the road to Christian unity. We are reminded, too, of the diaconal nature of the ecumenical task: there is an urgent need for Christians to collaborate in the work of reconciliation and to support those whose lives are devastated by poverty and oppression.

Scripture

Exodus 3:1-6	God's presence in the burning bush
Psalms 8:3-8	God crowns all people with glory and honour
Acts 9:1-5	I am Jesus whom you are persecuting
Matthew 25:31-46	As you did it to the least of these, you did it to me

Prayer

- Give thanks for God's glory present in all people, especially those we like least
- Give thanks for Indigenous Australians in their continued stewardship of creation and pray for the greater recognition of Indigenous land rights
- Pray for wisdom to recognise Christ in the 'other' and for generosity to welcome grace in the 'different'
- Pray for the churches of North, Central and South America; and in Australia, for those who find their home in the Anglican Church.

Collect

Eternal God, grant us so to recognise your presence among us in different ways that our desire for true community in our churches and society may be increased, and our yearning for the unity of your Church be more fervent. Amen.

Hope

'On that day you will know that I am in my
Father, and you in me, and I in you'
(John 14:20)

Scripture

Exodus 40:34-38 God journeys with them
Psalm 42 Hope in God, and praise
God again
Revelation 21:1-6 God will be with them
John 14:15-21 I will not leave you
desolate

Reflection

The Hebrew people were led by Moses through the desert. God's presence journeyed with them as a column of cloud by day and of fire by night. The afflicted psalmist remembers his community of faith and is confident God will restore him to fullness of life, joined again to his people. The new people born out of the gospel is also a pilgrim people, journeying towards fullness of life in the new creation where death will be no more, where pain and divisions are overcome. There will be one renewed and unified humanity in God. Now, however, we are together on the way, and not desolate, for God has given us the Spirit of hope and love for the journey.

The theme of these days of prayer has reminded us of Jesus' promise: "where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst". With Jesus as our companion, we travel together on a journey of hope. The reconciled and reconciling community to which we are committed in our ecumenical movement is a sign and an anticipation of the coming new creation. With God's grace, we are on a journey to live now already as much as possible "on earth as in heaven".

Prayer

- Give thanks to God for the hope that is in us
- Pray for those whose hope has faded or died
- Pray for renewed hope for Australia's Indigenous people
- Pray for all other churches in Australia and those who find their home in them
- Pray for all Australian churches to persevere in their ecumenical journey
- Pray for all people of Australia and for the unity of all humanity.

Collect

Pilgrim God, you lead us into the future, give us the hope that, united in the name of Jesus, death will not prevail, our divisions will be healed, and we will attain fullness of life, love and light in your new creation.
Amen.

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