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Voices of Hope: Making Peasce (Genesis 4. 8-12; Luke 15. 11-32)

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*Thankyou Benedictus for welcoming me through the zoom lens.
Thank You Sarah for your invitation to share the story of
Makingpeasce. Greetings to some of my dear friends who have
assisted me over the past few years as an idea has grown.*



I live and move and have my being today because my story emerged and flourished from a stolen place

I was born on Dharawal country at the foot of Mount Keira or 'Geera the mother, the keeper of knowledge'.

Geera bears upon her shoulders the first massacre sites by colonising forces on these lands we now call Australia.

The University of Wollongong nestles at her feet.

It was at Geera's feet that I would come to understand the veracity and extent of losses across the continent suffered by our first peoples *as a result of colonisation*.

And so, I pay my respects to Dharawal elders past, present and emerging who have kept language and culture safe through the stormingand are singing it back into the Illawarra with voices of hope.

Also, to the elders of the Ngunnawal lands where some of you sit this evening and to the Arrernte peoples on whose land I currently live. **I continue to learn deeply from all of them.**

The Arrernte peoples have an ancient calling to peacemaking and the healing of land and people. They produce healing medicines from compounds found in desert plants. I especially honour Uncle Chris Pelterre who has been my patient mentor for 8 years. Aunty Beverly, the most recent carrier of the ancient legend of the desert pea blood flower story who has welcomed me to her table.

It was on Dharawal ground that **my** clan of direct British descent tilled the soil in the food bowl of the Illawarra hinterland as market gardeners and horticulturists. We were 7 little Australians. Out of my window I could see endless rows of cabbages which my brother kindly explained was where babies came from. So as more and more babies, siblings and cousins were carried through the front door, I looked at my tiny bedroom shared with my sister and grandmother and wondered if there might be some cause for alarm. Would there, at the end of it all, be room for me?

Safe to say we were excellent colonisers. I was I and we were us. Whole, unfractured family and nourishment in the lucky country with its Judeo- Christian mantra of **You will not Kill... You will not covet.... You will not give false testimony**

(Exodus 20). **Love your neighbour as yourself** (Mark 12). **Do unto others as you would have them do to you** (Matthew 7).

For me there was always a whisper in my spirit about the neighbour, the other. A void that seemed to draw me to an absence even amongst abundance.

I was captured by the fancy outfits worn by Captain Cook and his entourage and wondered at the strange stick-like figures portrayed, *ant sized* in my social studies book...intermingled with the kangaroos on the horizon. Back at the market garden amongst the flower beds I would scan the hills trying to conjure up "The Aborigine" from my schoolbook and would often ask 'the grownups; 'where are they now '? The answer would come from **my elders**, "They are dying out ... our bloodline is stronger. Nothing we can do about it." I eyed my extended family tilling and chatting in the garden beds and a deep sadness sowed its seed in my heart that would remain nameless well into my adult life and long after those voices in the garden had faded.

Flowers and rituals around flowers were a daily part of my life. By 16 I was working alongside florists in my father's business. Over time I discovered that florists were purveyors of emotion bearing a kind of *social glue*. Especially where there was grief. Wherever words ceased or could not be framed in the shout of exaltation, or the cry of desolation we florists would show up. You will have noticed that there are particular flowers that are powerful community builders.

Think for a moment how the Daffodil attaches itself to the stories of those who have been touched by cancer and to a community of lovers and carers.

Borrowing from a philosopher I hold dear, Martin Buber:

(I think) flowers can act as (builders) assisting people to constellate around a living centre, to share an experience and together existentially respond to that experience. As a senior florist and teacher, I found myself increasingly in places where flowers stories, ritual and identity collided.

And I smelt a perfume called hope. It was there at the Bali bombing memorial as the frangipanis and wattle joined forces. and Black Saturday to name a few.

Single florets carried in the hand..... fashioned onto one wreath.

Each... **lost.... one** held, known, remembered and given over to love.

Away from country in the United States I met the Cherokee Rose and listened to a first nation story, the trail of tears, the exile and death march of the Cherokee off country in 1831.

In 2007 I passed through the floriscap of the sorry day flower. [Alyogyne Huegelii](#). The Australian Hibiscus, the **latin** name meaning "undivided woman". And then to The Australian War Memorial and to a small iconic flower called the Flanders poppy.

At the Australian War Memorial, an effigy of the real thing, an apology of black plastic and red nylon, is pressed daily into the crevices next to the name of a loved one mowed down in War. Small bindings of clans gather around their fallen one. This is repeated in a multiplicity of mini cells working together to form a super cell of stories until the walls are soaked with red.

Writing for the Recognised plant and flowers curriculum at Canberra Institute of Technology I came across many published stories held in libraries of Swainsona formosa, the Desert pea; somewhat inaptly named Sturt's Desert Pea. All stories recall it as a blood flower connected to blood spilt on the ground of first peoples prior to colonization. I learned that its homeopathic essence is given to those suffering shock, loss and grief.

In our Judeo-Christian tradition, the first spilling of blood occurs in what Girard calls the founding murder of Abel by his brother Cain. Cain's action germinated in his heart as jealous rivalry, that in his mind meant getting rid of 'the other' in a pattern that has imprinted itself on the human race.

Where is your brother Abel ? Am I my brother's keeper? What have you done? Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground ! (Genesis 4, Hebrews 12:24)

Indeed, Jesus taught that harbouring the cancellation of another.... merely in mind or speech was on the same level as raising your hand to bring physical harm (Matthew 5).

May I take you to an equally ancient voice in a Desert pea story possibly 40,000 years old..... which in essence is repeated wherever the pea roams. In this story a neighbouring tribe is motivated by jealousy and murders by ambush, men, women and children as they lay sleeping. On returning to the battle site the tribal chief and perpetrator finds that across the bloodscape, the red Desert pea has appeared as a memorial to the loss. **The same genesis voice is conjured.** Where are your brothers. [Tirlta](#)? Am I my brother's keeper? Cowardly murderer of women and children. Their blood cries out to me from the ground for more than life is in the blood.

In 2015 whilst writing for my Bachelor of theology I began to ask the question... What if this flower could speak as loudly as the poppy about blood on our own soil? And so, I began to take the first faltering steps to sit with sovereign peoples and seek their wisdom (over 7 years).

At times this took me to places of exile in heart that required me to "eat pods and husks, remnants of my origin story" and then to set my face towards the path home and back to hope.

I didn't know it then but around the same time Arrernte woman Beverly Ilpme O'Callaghan was asked the same question of the Desert peas in her garden in Alice Springs. Bev was seeking a way to foster understanding and heal the rift between settlers and indigenous children in Alice Springs schools. She will tell you that the flower seemed to call out to her from the land. [Her story](#) contains all the key elements of other stories from across the continent.

Providentially she did not name time or place but simply let the flower speak. Her dreaming tells of the coming of the whitefella and guns. It describes a process of tragic misunderstanding spelling the truth in love, venting the tension and impasse through the commemorative action of the pea which brought a resolution.

In the spring of 2017, I received an invitation to fly to Alice Springs and meet Bev. It is difficult to put into words what that meeting has meant for both of us ...settler and sovereign walking in a spirit of conciliation on behalf of the song of the pea.

Research over the past twenty years has put the reality of frontier violence beyond reasonable doubt. (Henry Reynolds)
Australia is steadying itself as it is confronted with the bleeding gash at the heart of our history. And the imaginary legal mandate to covet, kill and lie.

Henry Reynolds (2021) addresses this in his recently published book Truth - Telling , Where he maintains 'It was accepted in colonial society that Aboriginal people were more animal than **human** and killing them did not bring the legal consequences nor the burden of sin that followed the murder of a white person. This attitude was carried into every corner of the continent and is **still expressed in the memory of people alive today**'.

Lyndall Ryan who has [mapped](#) the killing fields and **Henry Reynolds** situate their research in the past where it is safer to handle. **However, it is far rawer and more recent than this.** In Alice Springs (as recounted to me by Warlpiri elders)in 1987 it was somehow acceptable to cover up the lacing of chardonnay bottles with strychnine in the Todd riverbed that resulted in an unknown number of Warlpiri people losing their lives.

In 1996 men, women and children were [gunned down](#) whilst dining at the Broad Arrow Cafe at Port Arthur. Australians rightfully went into shock. It was described as the worst massacre in our modern history. We wept collectively for [Alannah, Madeline](#) and her mother and we still do. We know their names. Over the last ten years I have listened to many testimonies across the country where food and drink has been a common way to gather aboriginals so that they could be easy and unsuspecting targets. men, women and children.

Where is their memorial? What were their names?

The Australian War Memorial is undertaking a [500-million-dollar](#) extension space for wars fought by Australians overseas which despite public opinion will not include blood spilt on our own shores.

There is now a daily escalation of a national debate on truth- telling. In my observation the polarizing rhetoric of woke culture is seeping into this space causing

people to freeze and making the problems of our past seem massive and intractable. Where the invitation to come to the table is met with a refusal to go. 'A kind of**speak to the hand**'.

Luke Pearson's recent [satirical piece](#) epitomises a growing violent rhetoric that is peppering our speech ... **'You can take anything you like off a white person in NAIDOC week, by any means necessary, but every time you use it you have to acknowledge them as the traditional owner and at least once a year you need to invite them to welcome you to use it'**.

In the great parable of the prodigal Son ([Luke 15:11–32](#)) God is portrayed as a loving father, who runs directly into the rift to bring not only forgiveness but the restoration of lost heritage to the perpetrator and assurance and rest for the victim. The story brings hope within the immediacy of a dialogue of love where the gap is closed, and the fallen brothers can see the other once again. And it is celebrated with a ceremonial feast.

Making Peasce believes that hope for a time such as this depends upon the hoppers. With Françoise Davoine and others that....'Memorialization is a well-travelled social process which can repair links as well as restore symbolic and social structures and gives agency in a cacophony of polarizing conversations.'

The flower story in duet of voice gives grief a name. It calls **all** to gather around the truth... to create and hold in the intimacy of the hand a sacrament of hope.

It gives permission to atone and rest to the victim.

It symbolises and personifies that one far greater than Abel's blood has been poured out for all.

It carries the despair of death and the hidden.... into resurrection light.

It brings rightful and perpetual memorial and does not reach out to 'cancel'.

The only thing the Father cancels in the parable of the prodigal son is guilt.

In the words of Peter Stork, himself a European holocaust survivor (2006):

There can be no peace unless, also the cries of those with unresolved forgiveness have been heard. Guilt belongs to the old consciousness, so does unforgiveness.

The love of God as portrayed in the parable of the prodigal son when received in faith undoes both.

Only the suffering of God in Christ can infuse the massive suffering of brutalised humanity with new meaning. Only the assurance that ultimate forgiveness is available can meet the deepest need of perpetrators and victims alike.

Two years ago a conversation began with the Palawa Kani Elders, the Tasmanian RSL, [Reconciliation Tasmania](#) and Governor of Tasmania and Making Peasce around what rightful and perpetual memorial of the Tasmanian massacres might look like. As a

result I was privileged to work with Aunty Wendal Pitchford and others to bring the Wandering Warrior pea emblem.

[Kenedia prostrata](#) is a cousin of [Swainsona formosa](#). It symbolises binding together. On April 25th 2021 they went to the gates in agreement opening the way to ongoing commemoration for the first time in our combined history.

Video at <https://makingpeasce.com/> .

Feedback, collaboration and suggestions most welcome:

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