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## **Changing Minds, Changing Hearts (Matthew 4.12-17)**

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‘The call of Jesus at the beginning of his public teaching was to repent’. The Greek word behind that is ‘metanoia’, meaning change your mind. ‘Change the way you're looking, don't beat yourself up for the mistakes you've made but understand where you are and change your perspective’.<sup>1</sup> These words are Laurence Freeman’s, and come from his explanation of the World Community for Christian Meditation’s choice of ‘Metanoia’ as its theme for 2023.

As we know, there are many things we need to repent of ... culturally, economically, historically, personally – ways we’ve been, choices we’ve made, perspectives we’ve held that now show themselves to be limiting, destructive, wounding to ourselves and others and our planet.

This weekend, in Australia, the church focuses particularly on the need for national repentance for the wounds inflicted on First Nations peoples, cultures and country by the invasion and violent colonisation of this land. This tradition arose from a meeting held on January 26 1938, when Aboriginal leaders including William Cooper, met for a Day of Mourning, seeking equality and full citizenship (though that would take another 30 years). The Australian Churches were then asked to set aside the Sunday before January 26 as Aboriginal Sunday, a day for Christians to act in solidarity with First Nations peoples.<sup>2</sup>

And it seems to me that this year, the year a referendum will be held on the question of constitutionally entrenching an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament, this call to solidarity is even more than usually pressing. As you know, the call for the ‘Voice’ came from the 2017 Statement from the Heart which itself emerged from two years of extensive consultation with Aboriginal and Torres

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<sup>1</sup> <https://wccm.org/events/metanoia/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.commongrace.org.au/aboriginal\\_sunday\\_2023](https://www.commongrace.org.au/aboriginal_sunday_2023)

Strait Islander peoples, culminating in the National Constitutional Convention at Uluru. The Statement from the Heart movingly outlines the legacy and extent of injustice continuing to be suffered by Australia's first peoples, and describes 'the structural nature of our problem' as 'the torment of our powerlessness'. It's in this context, says the Statement, that:

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

An enormous amount of work has been done to flesh out the detail of this proposal and is publicly available. Yet already, forces are at work to foster confusion, division, uncertainty regarding the referendum question. By drawing on the fig-leaf of 'reasonable doubt' as to its operation, by refusing to participate constructively and in good faith in the conversation, some are prepared to sacrifice justice and the future well-being of indigenous Australians, and indeed every one of us, for the sake of their own self-serving interests. Aboriginal Sunday reminds us that resisting this injustice and untruth is something we are all responsible for. And this means being well-enough informed, being connected enough to what is at stake, that we can speak for the Voice when necessary in our families, workplaces and communities.

This does not require legal expertise. In fact, when Jesus wanted to challenge the forces of untruth in his time and place, he deliberately didn't get bogged in the legalistic terrain they tried to draw him into. Instead, he told stories – parables that helped people to see the question and themselves differently. Stories that showed up their assumptions and blindspots, and enabled them to feel the shadow and violence embedded even in what they thought of as their goodness. I have come across no more powerful parable in the Australian context than this story by Goorie author Melissa Lucashenko.<sup>3</sup> I want to share it with you.

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<sup>3</sup> Melissa Lucashenko (2005), 'Country: Being and belonging on aboriginal lands', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 29:86, 7-12, pp.10-12.

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