

Looking for a sign

20 January 2019, Aboriginal Sunday

A sermon on Isaiah 62:1-5, Psalm 36:5-10, 1 John 2:1-11, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 by Samara Pitt

Some of the following words of love and affection come from the mouth of the Lord according to Isaiah. Some come from a little research amongst my friends. Can you guess which is which...?

Crown of beauty
My delight
Love of my life
Hubsy
Wifey
Pinkle
Nuuf nuuf
Bebeshnooks

I want you to think of someone who loves you, a person. What are some of those little love names you've been called? Or maybe you've heard 'a friend' saying to their beloved? Anyone brave enough to share?

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I thought nothing really rhymed with Samara, then I got a whole poem using words like tiara and japara, which was *kind of* romantic. As a kid, my Mum sometimes called me 'sweetness and light'.

In Isaiah, we hear that God's beloved has been called all sorts of horrible and hurtful names, such as 'forsaken', 'desolate', 'reject', 'loser'. The prophet of God tells us that he won't shut up until the true beauty and belovedness of God's people is known and revealed for all to see.

Today is Aboriginal Sunday, a day instigated by William Cooper for churches to come together in Christian solidarity to cry out for full citizenship rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Brooke Prentice is an Aboriginal Christian leader from the Waka Waka people Queensland. She speaks of the role of Aboriginal people before colonisation as custodians of creation in this place. On January 26, 1788 she describes their role changing to being one of mourning and survival, and she says this hasn't changed. At the service of prayer on Friday night at Essendon Baptist, she pointed out that all the health and justice statistics that detail some of the disadvantage faced by Indigenous Peoples compared to the rest of the population – infant mortality, rates of people being imprisoned, deaths from diabetes - are almost exactly the same as last year.

So, how might we be like Isaiah, in helping each other recognise how God sees those who are often demonised or stigmatised? Do extravagant love names help?

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Psalm 36 encourages us to look at creation. The heavens, the clouds, the mountains, the deeps, the animals and the people. All of these remind the psalmist of the steadfast love of God, God's faithfulness, God's deep desire for justice so that people and animals might be saved.

Not sure about you, but if I watch or read the news about the state of the created world, the steadfast love of God is not the first thing that springs to mind. Maybe it depends what you read! Can anyone think of some news stories about the heavens, the clouds, the mountains the seas or the animals recently? Are they hopeful? Are they discouraging? Are they a sign pointing to God?

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I wonder whether we need to go out ourselves and really see the creation around us. It doesn't make the news not true, but the news is not always telling us all the story. I think the news often points to problems, and the news can make us think that humans make all the problems and humans need to solve all the problems. There is some truth to that, but it's not the whole story.

The psalmist says of God: all people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house. You give them drink from the river of your delights. With you is the fountain of life. In your light, we see light. I think the psalmist is in love!

It also sounds to me like the psalmist is someone who has actually gone out and sat beneath stars, taken refuge under a shady tree, eaten wild food from the land, drunk from cool fresh water, got good and soaked under a waterfall on a hot day, seen how the light of the early sun shines off everything all around. We can see these things too, and when we love the land around us, we'll want to look after it and protect it and learn from it, because the land can teach us about God, it can help us encounter and understand the Creator. The First Peoples of this land can teach us about this.

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Then in the gospel according to John, we come to a wedding. Who has ever put on a wedding for a family member? What was it like?

A joyful event? Often. A stressful social situation where you have to put on a show and spend lots of money and make sure everyone is well fed? Yep, it can be that too!

Jesus and his mother Mary and his disciples all get invited to this wedding in Cana, Galilee.

Then in the middle of the feast, Mary notices that there is a problem. She is a noticer, Mary. When Jesus was born and the old folks Anna and Simeon in the

temple prophesied over her baby son, we hear that she stored up all these things and pondered them in her heart. I wonder what else she has noticed about Jesus as he has grown up, spent time learning and debating with the teachers in the temple, going out to be baptised by the prophet John in the desert, calling his disciples.

So now, when the wine runs out at the wedding, she dobs Jesus in. Jesus makes it clear he doesn't want to get involved. Maybe he knows that once he starts interfering in things, life is going to get more dangerous for him and everyone connected with him. But Mary just turns to the servants and tells them to do what Jesus says. And they do. Of course they do, because you know who's going to cop the blame when someone's waving for their cup to get filled up, and the servants have to tell them that there's none left? It's like my young female housemate who works at Brumbies bakery on minimum wage getting yelled at by a man in a suit because Brumbies charges a 15% surcharge on EFTPOS transactions under \$10. It wasn't *her* idea. So those servants, I reckon they'd be doing whatever they can to put off being yelled at.

So, with Mary, the servants get to be the first people to notice that the water they poured into the big stone water jars has turned into some very fine wine indeed. The steward doesn't really get it, the rest of the guests are probably well tanked by now and have no idea what's just happened under their noses.

Can you just imagine the servants gaping over at Jesus? I wonder, how is Jesus feeling? How is Mary feeling?

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John tells us it's the first sign that revealed Jesus' glory. And it's not a super serious miracle that challenges the temple system or confronts people with their prejudices and their blindness. That will come. But this first sign is a joyful, cheeky, celebratory, good news sign of the incoming culture of God. Most of the guests have no idea. But the mother of Jesus gave him a push, the servants followed his instructions and were amazed, and we are told that the disciples saw it, and believed in him. Jesus has been outed, and we are invited to pay attention to him. He's showing us a sign of the nature and the culture of God.

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And finally, we get to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. He's talking to them about gifts of the Spirit, and he says it's not really about the gifts, it's about whether the Holy Spirit of God is in those gifts, and whether they are being used for the common good. We've been given these gifts, remember, and they don't *belong* to us for our own personal satisfaction or status. Jesus didn't just top up his own wine cup, or those of his mother and disciples. Gifts are for the common good (which we may well be part of!), and that's where they also become another sign that can reveal the glory of God.

After the service today, as a sign of the emerging culture of God, and in solidarity with Aboriginal Christians and churches across the country, I'm going to invite you to come outside, take your shoes off, and stand around our sign for a photo. We will do this as a sign of truth-telling of our shared history and in acknowledgment of a people beloved by the Creator, the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Yalukit Willam clan of the Boonwurrung people.

Every now and then, it's good to tell each other about how you've seen God the Creator in the creation around us, how you've seen Jesus when someone puts themselves at risk to bring joy or justice or healing to another, how you've seen the Holy Spirit at work through gifts shared for the common good.

We hear about gifts often in our liturgy. We are told that people are seeking a place to share their gifts and leave their burdens. We are invited to approach the table with the gifts that we are and the gifts that we bring.