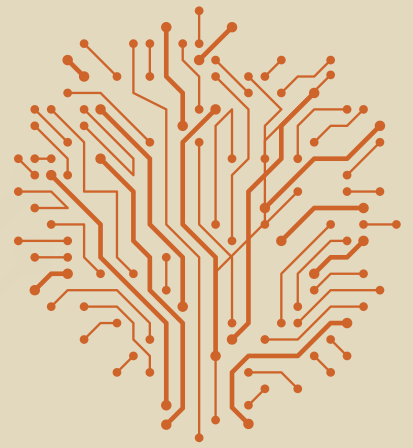


Spring-Summer 2022



SALTBUSH

UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY

Land

**Ruminations**

**Ruminations** is brought to you as part of **Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community**. The Uniting Church Synod of NSW & ACT oversees this work as an encouragement to all rural Christian communities and their leaders, irrespective of size or location. You are invited to share this issue of Ruminations with others.

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**Jeff Anderson** - Jeff lives with his wife Kay just outside of Narromine, NSW. Jeff has been in farming throughout his life and is a member of Narromine Uniting Church and encourager of Saltbush.

**Dr John Williams FTSE**- John seeks to bring together his Christian discipleship and his scientific research in the natural resource sciences to frame an integration of scientific and theological foundations for caring for creation in all its diversity. John is a lay preacher within the Uniting Church and currently an honorary professor at ANU Crawford School of Public Policy.

**Nathan Tyson** - Nathan works with the Synod of NSW & ACT in the role of Director, First Peoples Strategy and Engagement. Nathan is an Aboriginal man who has spent most of his life in Sydney and is of Anaiwon/Gomerioi descent.

**Rev Radhika Sukumar-White** - Radhika is the Minister of the Word at Leichhardt Uniting Church. She is a 2nd Generation Sri Lankan Tamil Australian, and grew up in Canberra before moving to Sydney to study Physiotherapy, Music, and then Theology. Radhika is passionate about leading vibrant worship, preaching, teaching, and walking alongside individuals in their life and faith journey.

**Rev. Simon Hansford** - Simon is the Moderator of the NSW & ACT Synod and lives in Tamworth, NSW. Simon has been in rural placements throughout his ministry and is passionate about an equitable place at the table for rural people and for Uniting Christian communities as part of the wider body of the church.

**Rev. Geoff Wellington & Betty Pearson** have contributed the images for this edition of Ruminations. Most of the photographs throughout are from Geoff's recent trip out west as part of his Long Service Leave. Betty Pearson has kindly given permission for us to use her paintings from her time in Broken Hill with Will. Betty's paintings are beautiful, contemporary, depictions of the vast western landscape.

# Editor's Introduction - Land

**Rev. Mark Faulkner** | Director of Rural and Remote Ministry Initiatives

Welcome to your Spring-Summer edition of Ruminations with the theme of Land.

The Saltbush team choose our Ruminations's themes for each year because we feel each is relevant, significant both in terms of faith and church while connected to our lives and storytelling. For 2023 we have chosen the themes of Stories, Table and Song! We have also decided to include as often as possible a comment/reflection from Nathan Tyson who works with the Synod of NSW & ACT in the role of Director, First Peoples Strategy and Engagement. Nathan's article in this issue of Ruminations – Land: A Cultural Perspective – continues to give voice to ongoing conversation around reconciliation and relationship as part of our faith and wider community.

During 2022 I read the book by Simon Winchester – Land, How the Hunger for Ownership Shaped the Modern World! As the chapters unfold the centrality of land, coupled with the injustice that has emerged over 1000's of years is confronting.

Of course, land has not always been "owned" and it seems only now, as humanity is confronted with our ugly, heavy footprint and exploitation of the earth and the environmental catastrophe that sits before us that we are, perhaps, beginning to realise that there is more to the relationship with land that has to be rediscovered. As we listen to our indigenous peoples across the earth we can hear a voice that says: before ownership, price and profit there is relationship.

Simon Winchester writes:

**Place may of course be many things – it may be sea or earth or a spot in the firmament or on some distant world. And place may in many cases actually be land. But land is in all cases, and always, place. (p41)**

Land as "place" is a connection we may know intellectually within, and as individuals who may have bought a slice, but land as place, for people's, cultures, traditions, communities, is way deeper and vital to any hopeful relationship with creation and each other for our future.

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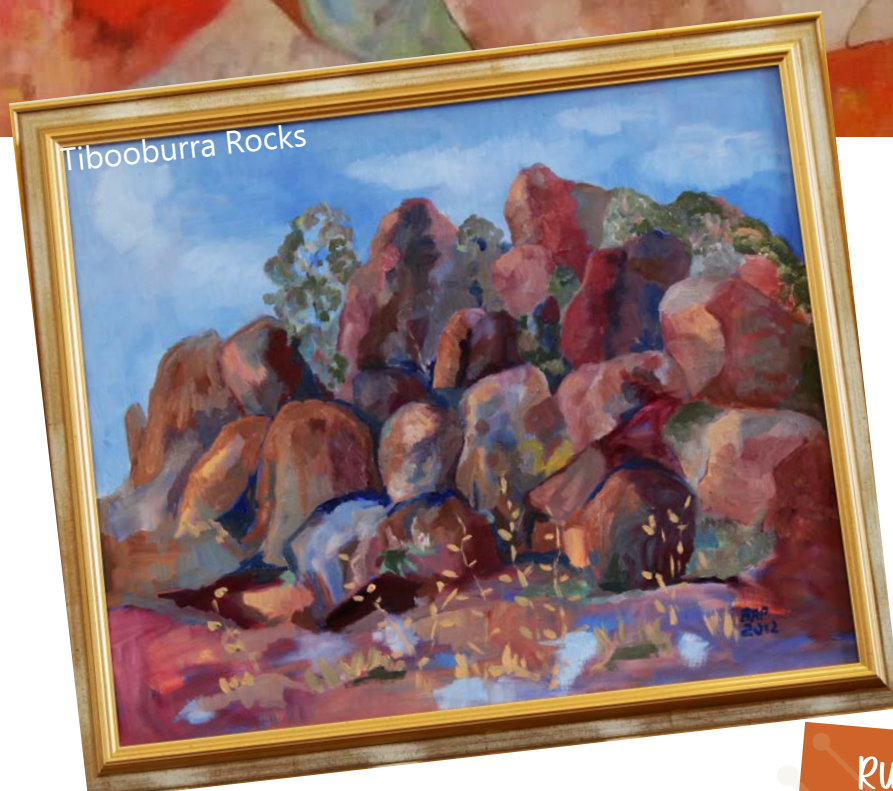
Each contributor to Ruminations has as vast freedom to write as they feel drawn and inspired and I commend to your attention the way each have pondered individually our theme of Land, as being part of place, the holy, relationship, love and tradition.

As a challenge, I also commend to your thinking, consideration of your own relationship to land and where your own slice of real-estate sits as part of the land on which we live.

Mark .



Immense Outback



Tibooburra Rocks

# Land: Connection & Belonging

**Rev. Tim Jensen** | Saltbush Scattered Community Minister

This seasons theme on 'Land', evokes for many of us a deep sense of connection and belonging, though I fear the more we consider land as a transactional piece of dirt the more we move away from that very significant connection. The thought that land is personal property might reinforce the belief that the land is at our mercy. Yet as the Polish-British author Joseph Conrad writes (quoted from the original text): 'Each blade of grass has its spot on earth whence it draws its life, its strength; and so is man rooted to the land from which he draws his faith together with his life.' We have a special relationship with the land that moves us beyond that strange sense of ownership to one where we are 'rooted' in the dirt and from here we find our place.

Considering the theme and Conrad's words, I have pondered how we relate with land and where that relationship leads us.

In Australia after hundreds of years of colonisation the larger population is beginning to acknowledge what First Nations people have been telling us all this time: we are on aboriginal land. And with this I acknowledge that I am on Bundjalung land, and I pay my respects to this land's original custodians.

On a more global scale there is the politics of land, Russia claiming Ukraine and China with its eyes set on Taiwan. In this mix is the politics of climate change and how rising sea levels are affecting island nations and coastlines. Never to forget its impact on prolonged droughts and the constant rain we are now experiencing. Yet all of this is dwarfed by other natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, that can change a landscape in a matter of hours.

The land on which I was born in Rabaul has now been reclaimed by the rainforest because of the volcanic eruption in 1994, much of the town was covered by metres of ash. In Darwin the land where we lived was reshaped by Cyclone Tracy and recently up here in northern NSW so much land has been changed because of the floods.

This is probably why my own relationship with land has led me to see myself as a transient occupant, whose role is to take care of the land for the next transient occupant. Where we are simply sojourners on this earth. From dust we have come and to dust we shall return.

A Warlpiri friend of mine was excited to return to her country on the community of Lajamanu. She told me the first thing she will do is run around barefoot until

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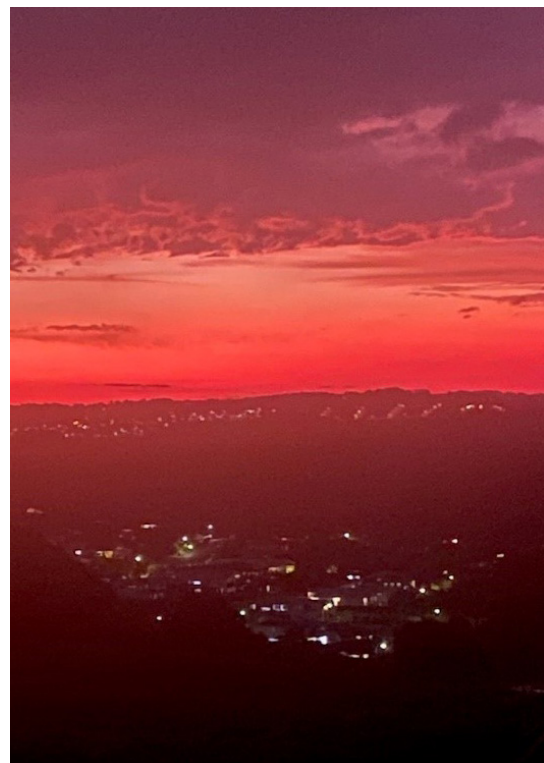
her feet were stained with the colour of the desert soil. It connected her with land, with her place of birth, with her history. She was also part of the stolen generation and was removed from this land. To return for her had a deeper significance. For her land was not owned, it was not a transactional piece of property listed on a website, it soaked deep into her skin, it moved her to an identity, a place of connection that spanned thousands of years.

Then to a grazier from the Barcoo region of western Queensland. He also honoured the land and was thankful for its diversity. He told me, "If anything else as graziers we need to care for this land and the land cares for us. It's a kind of relationship that goes beyond making big bucks, we are freed to identify our place in its vastness.' For him the land needed to be considered more than a commodity but a place of deeper connection.

From a Biblical perspective the land is sacred, a place of promise, a place of encountering mystery, of being in the presence of the Holy. The place where Moses stood before a burning bush in bare feet, for he was on holy ground, the land promised to the Hebrew nation and to the Messiah who travelled the land inviting us all to recognise the reign of God in the lands we inhabit.

The reign of God speaks of justice, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, love, and hope (just to name a few). This reign of God speaks of how we are to be with others, but I believe it would also extend to the land and to all creation. For justice also relates to the land and how it benefits all creation and not just to the few who are rich and powerful enough to afford land. Something that Jesus often uses in parable form, 'There was once a landowner, who leased a vineyard...'. Matthew 20; Matthew 21; Mark 12; Luke 20. Jesus is calling us to a deeper connection with land that moves beyond our own self-directed desire, to consider the land as a place of justice and belonging for all creation.

Which brings me back to my friend whose feet are stained with the dirt of her country. If we are to reflect the justice of God's reign, then we need to seek a way forward with First Nations people and recognise the importance of their relationship with land and find ways of reconciliation. In this way we may also want to acknowledge how we relate to the dirt beneath our feet. How do we honour the land on which we live, understand its history and its geography? How are we in relationship with the land on which we work, love, live and pray?



Tim

# Sacredness of Land



**Annie Baker**

The Presbytery of the Downs  
Queensland

The saying, 'you can take the girl out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the girl', rings true for me. My roots to the land have come from parents, grandparents and great grandparents. My parents and those before were raised in the Riverina and both grew up in a small community called Boree Creek. The land provided for their family, however after the war and the depression, it became increasingly difficult to divide the land among their family and continue to be able to provide for the next generation, so in the early 60's, my parents, my aunt and uncle and my grandfather moved to southern Queensland to start afresh.

I was born and bred in rural southern Queensland, enjoying the open spaces, the smell and feel of sheep, the dust of the sheep yards, the feel of

the rich moist soil at planting time and the taste of wheat seeds in your mouth at harvest. We were provided for through the many veggies that mum and my aunty grew and the lamb, beef and chickens that grew on the farm, and the provision of my grandfather when things were really tough. It was a blessed life.

When I was young it was a playground, a place to have an adventure. We spent a lot of time playing outside. We made mud pies when we were young and enjoyed the feel of mud in our hands. This was rich brigalow belah country that produced healthy crops when it rained. The soil was like a cake mix at planting time when it was soft and moist. I loved to run my hands through it. At one point we lived on a mostly dry river, however after it flooded, we loved to take our fishing line down and see what we could catch. It was mostly catfish, although there was the odd yellow belly. We spent hours playing on the logs. The outdoors was calming and peaceful.

My direct connection to the land had a break for a few years while at boarding school, attending university, and starting a career. I would have loved to return immediately but that opportunity didn't exist.

I returned at 30 years of age to 325 acres that wasn't big enough to sustain us but it was a start. Here we had the opportunity to raise a family and give them an opportunity to appreciate the land on which they were raised and to see it as

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God's creation. I saw my role as a caretaker, for the next generation and also for God. In Genesis 1 where God grants 'dominion' over every living thing, I see this as a responsibility not a right.

The land on which we worked and lived gradually grew to 1500 acres over the next 20 years. For the majority of my adulthood until my early fifties, it was a place that on one hand was a place of refuge and on the other it was a place that moved from harshness to abundance as we looked to provide a living for our family while caring for the land. On one hand it was fertile and green and produced crops and calves. At the other end of the spectrum, it could be hard and dry when the rains didn't come and the crops died and the country looked and felt like a desert plain. It was a roller coaster ride. At times there was great joy in driving the tractor along long stretches of land as you planted a new crop and gave thanks for the opportunity. At other times there was great solace where over the same stretch of land, I drove the tractor with a spray rig connected to kill the weeds that grew yet there was insufficient rain to plant a crop.

I marvelled at the complexity of the soil and the creatures that lived within it. During our time, a small lizard was discovered on ours and our neighbours land that was very rare. If you didn't know it was there, you wouldn't know it was there. It was so tiny and blended in beautifully with the colour of the soil. These along with thousands of other creatures called this piece of land home. We did what we could to care for this land for future generations to come.

It was the place where children were born and parents died. It was where calves and pups were born and cows, a bull and dogs died. Here I experienced the breadth of life and death. This was also a place where I could sit on the verandah and gaze out at the open space and pray, and stand in the same place at night and marvel at the lightening that came across the plain in a storm. It was a place of great richness that was spiritual and transformational.

The land I now inhabit is a town block with a small front yard and back yard. I learnt from the many years of drought on the farm how important a small piece of green grass is for my mental health. Through COVID we started growing veggies where there might normally have been flowers and so we continue to delight in the opportunity to harvest food from the land on which we work and live, as small as this may be at times. I take time each day to sit and give thanks to God for the beauty that surrounds me.

"In Genesis 1 where God grants 'dominion' over every living thing, I see this as a responsibility not a right"

There seems to be a paradox. While living on the land and seeking our daily provision from it, I was blinded towards the fullness of its beauty and life that I drew from it. I took it for granted. Now that I no longer have that opportunity, I seek the bush and the openness of this great south land to engage with it again in a more spiritual way. I again find myself drawn to the openness of our land and all that dwells upon it. We therefore enjoy driving and marvelling at the sky and the many hundreds of different types of trees that line our roads and landscapes that we travel through. We also now take the opportunity to sit quietly on the edge of a riverbank where we can and listen for the still small voice of God. I give thanks for the life, love and provision that I have received, through God's provision and the land on which we have lived and worked.



# Western Paintings

Artwork by Betty Pearson



Outback from Broken Hill



Dust Storm

# Land



**Jeff Anderson**

When I was asked to write about 'land' I first turned to the Bible Concordance where I found many references.

The land is extremely important to all of us as much of the food we eat is dependent on the land – grains, vegetables, fruit, even livestock, milk, and fibre can be traced back to the land.

"LAND" - as a farmer I love the land. I come from a farming family that four generations ago started into fruit and vegetable production in a suburb in Sydney (Panania). My grandfather and my father continued the vegetable growing until the suburban sprawl encouraged a move to the Camden area where we continued to grow vegetables – mainly potatoes, pumpkins and carrots – and we also had a dairy. The land at

Camden was very suitable for those vegetables and we needed to plough the soil to a good depth to grow the best crops we possibly could. With the passing of years the urban sprawl again caught up with us and we made the move to Narromine and the change to grain crops, livestock and more recently adding cotton. The soil on any farm is our most important asset and we, as farmers, use our soil sustainably because we want it to be in a best order possible when we pass it on to the next generation.

Farming methods have certainly changed in the years that we have been farming. We now practice minimum tillage, rather than plough and conventional farming. There is some reference to ploughing in the Bible and reference to swords being beaten into ploughshares. These references could be talking about ploughing the soil with mouldboard ploughs, these ploughs slice the soil and turn it over creating a seedbed for the farmer to scatter his seed over the ploughed field.

Many years ago when in the local Junior Farmers Club my brother and I were introduced to Ploughing Competitions where the aim is to plough a ½ acre plot of land with a 2-furrow mouldboard plough and a small tractor to the best of your ability within a specified time and it is judged on straightness, weed control, neatness etc, and then compared to the others in the contest, and the winner announced. It was not a very exciting spectator contest, and it has been described as being as exciting as watching paint dry, but for those involved it has

a real fascination. The aim is to treat the soil as best you can and that becomes challenging with different soil types and weather conditions.

During the many years we were involved in ploughing contests I had the opportunity to compete in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania as well as a sponsored trip to New Zealand to plough in 5 or 6 contests in the South Island. In 1988 I competed in a World Ploughing Contest in Iowa, USA. This was a great experience, there were representatives from many different countries, especially considering I was with my brother, Pete representing Australia. Peter had also competed 1969 in a world contest in Yugoslavia where he came second. We were privileged to meet up with many people on these trips and to share ideas and farming methods. There was always a desire world-wide in farming to care for the land.

After many years of farming I still get excited to see a seed germinate and emerge from a well-prepared seed bed. I thank God that I have had the privilege to see this over many years. I have spent hundreds of hours on a tractor and it's a place where I often talk with God and thank God for the land that he has provided and for the privilege of being a Christian farmer.



# Land: A cultural perspective...



**Nathan Tyson**

Director, First Peoples Strategy  
and Engagement

The 2017 Statement from the Heart includes the following passage:

*"Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago."*

The passage speaks of the possession of country under Aboriginal laws and customs – "from the Creation". First Peoples have stories of Creation that have been handed down over millennia, and similarly we have stories of the Creator – known by many names in our Aboriginal languages, for example "Baiaame". I see Baiaame, the Creator in my culture, as God (the Creator), just named in a different cultural context. God has had many names in different sociolinguistic contexts – for example YHWH, El Shaddai, Elohim, Jehova, and Adonai. Many names for the one God. We all need to be able to know God, and to be able to contemplate the mystery of Divinity, in our own cultural context.

According to Genesis, humans were created by God and tasked with caring for Creation. Respect for country, and for all creation, is an intrinsic part of Aboriginal cultures and spirituality. For over 60,000 years prior to colonisation Aboriginal peoples lived in a sustainable way, in harmony with the environment.

As a result of colonisation, capitalism, and industrialisation, this country has been subject to farming practices and building practices that have both negatively impacted the environment and caused Aboriginal peoples to be dispossessed of, and disenfranchised from, their ancestral country. Aboriginal peoples have been significantly denied the ability to maintain their cultural and spiritual ties with country, and consequently denied the ability to care for their country. This has caused grief and trauma for Aboriginal peoples. It has also caused trauma for country.

Land is seen by most people today as a possession, as an asset, as something to be used for personal gain, as something to be cleared, farmed and mined, rather than as an invaluable source of sustainable existence. Sadly, the state of the Australian environment is no longer pristine – we have seen rivers dying, lands denuded of topsoil, forests cleared, many species of animals now extinct or on the verge of extinction. In 2022 we see the impacts of climate change being felt around the world: temperatures rising, glaciers melting, sea levels rising, and extreme weather events becoming more frequent. (I have the urge to add: “This is not a drill!”)

The evidence of humanity’s failings in our responsibilities to care for Creation is all around us: in floods, in droughts, in famine, in the destruction of forests and habitats, and in global conflicts. Ideologies of capitalism and wealth creation are fuelling greed and selfishness. We need to be more concerned with the health of our lands, rivers and animals than how many likes we get on social media, how many pairs of shoes we have, or how many houses we can accumulate. We need to value humanity, each other, as more important than the material possessions we might accumulate. We need to love our neighbours and care for the planet.

We need to value and learn from First Peoples’ wisdom in relation to caring for creation and sustainable “on country” practices. Non-Indigenous Australians need to be open to alternative perspectives on land management and food production. Non-Indigenous people need to understand the irony of saying “but this is the way we have always done it” (for the last 234 years or less) compared to how it has really “always” been done (for 60,000+ years).

I am not suggesting we ditch technology or live in the bush without shelter, refrigeration, or the internet etc - humanity has made many advances in science and technology that can help sustain our existence. What I am suggesting is that we need to consider how we treat country, how we farm, how we produce, how we “take”, and ensure that we do this sustainably, and that we “give” back to country so that there is balance. Everyone can make a difference. We should be moving rapidly to renewable energy (eg. wind, solar, hydro). We should plant more trees, restore rivers and waterways, revitalise and protect ecosystems, and recycle everything! Buy vintage! Compost! Plant a veggie garden! Turn lights off! Spend less time in the shower! Walk more, drive less!

I suppose my enthusiasm is because I know our relationship with Country is critical to our survival, whether you are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. We all need air to breathe, food to eat, and water to drink. If we want sound advice on sustainable practices then the wisdom of 60,000+ years, the wisdom of the oldest continuing culture on the planet, is literally on our doorstep. Let us work together, in our love for God, and in our love for each other, to care for Creation.

# Holy Ground & Acknowledging Country



**Radhika Sukumar-White**  
Leichhardt Parish Mission

Take your shoes off, and place your feet on the floor, firmly enough that you feel the floor under you. Imagine yourself being planted into the ground. Now imagine the people, creatures and organisms that have been on that same ground before you. What might they have looked like? What might they have been doing on a day like today? How many creatures called that specific land home before you did? What kind of landscape did God create before we paved paradise and put up an apartment block? Lush and green, dry and brown, dense or sparse? Do you feel like the ground you are on is holy ground?

We all worship on land – whether it's in Leichhardt in the Inner West of Sydney (where I currently serve as Minister), in other churches, in our homes, in nature: we worship on land. Land is inevitably political. In the Genesis story of creation, land is creation and country. In the entry into the Promised Land, land is more ambiguous; it's a gift for landless people, AND a site for invasion, AND a location for a new community. That ambiguity grows stronger in the rule of Solomon, for whom promised land becomes real estate and a source of political power. It is into that heritage that capitalism stands AND the church stands, built on stolen land, Indigenous land. It's uncomfortable but this legacy really is ours because we the Church have explained, justified or remained silent in the face of this reality.

Our individual stories also affect the way we look at land. For me, as the child of migrants, my sense of land is complex. I, a Sri Lanka Tamil Australian woman, live on land where sovereignty was never ceded, with a difficult history and present relating to immigration and multiculturalism. Alongside that, the land my parents migrated from, the north of Sri Lanka, is only now starting to recover from a civil war between my people (Tamils) and the majority Sinhalese, mainly over land rights and sovereignty – sovereignty there takes a different meaning to the ways we hear about it in Australia; the call for Tamil sovereignty was a call for a separate autonomous state. And so I live and work on a land that I don't feel I belong to, nor it to me. I am very much an outsider, living in peace and safety, thanks to the (perhaps) undeserved welcome my parents received from Australia. For this reason, the Acknowledgement of Country practise/ritual holds deep meaning for me, as it repeatedly reminds me to recognise where I worship not as land but as country – a very different concept.

Beginning worship with an Acknowledgement of Country is about the threshold we cross when we enter worship – our lens alters. Even while worshipping online, worship must begin with social location – who and where are we, as members of the body of Christ, here and today? And being confronted with that question at the beginning of worship should resonate through the rest of the service. For example, does the way we read Scripture in worship reflect a colonial reading and agenda, focusing on those at the centre rather than on the edge? Does our worship reflect a nation-state view of religion – internalised, privatised, socially irrelevant, and subject to the demands of patriotism and nationalism? Do we exclude texts and voices that challenge our upper-middle-class social location?

We acknowledge country at the beginning of worship as an expression of our commitment to the covenant between the UCA and the UAICC, and the deep humility needed to even exist as a church in Australia, on stolen land where sovereignty was never ceded. It's a small act not of reconciliation, but of reparation for the past and present sins of the Church towards indigenous peoples. The covenant, the preamble to the UCA Constitution, the Day of Mourning don't mean anything unless we actively live out our commitment to relationship, our humility and our repentance, and see our practices as steps along the way towards a wholly different, reconstructed relationship with First Peoples.

*"...everyone has a seat at the table, and no one goes hungry"*

Acknowledging country at the beginning of worship is also hopeful and prayerful. Jennifer Harvey in her book *Dear White Christians* encourages us imitate Zacchaeus. She says, "we are called to figure out all the ways we are in debt because of having benefitted from these racial and imperial realities, and to unequivocally come down from the tree and give back to those with whom we have long shared and continue to share a thoroughly interrelated structural life." So, when we acknowledge country, we imagine a reality different from what is generally accepted; we imagine the world and God's place in the world in a different way. It is a way we imagine the Kingdom of God, where everyone has a seat at the table, and no one goes hungry.

Dear reader, bring your attention back to your feet, and the land they are on. Recognise that creatures and people have walked that land long before you. Recognise that some of those people are the least and most disadvantaged and oppressed in Australia's story. Recognise that Christ is to be found in those very people, according to Matthew 25. Recognise that we live and work and worship in a particular context and time; turn your eyes away from heaven and become more present right here and now. The land that you are on, says God, is holy ground.

# Our Land: Sacred...Bountiful...Bleeding... Frightening, yet Friend



**Dr John Williams**  
Lay Preacher

When we examine our thinking and feeling about Land as central to creation and our place and relationship to it, I wonder if it can be characterized by at least five emotions.

Sacred



Bountiful



Bleeding



Spring-Summer 2022

Frightening



Yet our land is also companion and friend.

Friend



Given all the feeling and senses we have to our land...how should we live? We see the damage, the pressure of our presence, its central to creation, its sacred, its bountiful, its bleeding, it's frightening yet we a learning to love it and see more...Land is both a sacred cow and a milking cow. It can harm us, it can feed us, it can nurture us, it can sustain us. But how as people of faith in Jesus the Christ do we see our calling?

**I think we have a new story emerging**

I see a big picture – that God is reconciling and restoring all creation.

This is the story we can share with whoever will listen.

Creator God blessed the whole creation – which includes us...but not only us...

Creator God acts and speaks  
both within and beyond creation....

God cared so deeply for humanity  
to become flesh and dwell with us.

I am convinced that God cares deeply  
for all that God has created and continues to create....  
To see more clearly God's concern for the reconciliation and restoration of all  
creation is a fundamental part of the gospel.  
It is not a side show, an add-on extra, but rather the gospel at its core.  
Engaging this truth ensures that we do have a story to lead us into the future.

This is my passion –  
That in the light of this deep gospel story we will need to re-discover, affirm, and  
live out our new story... we need to develop our story...a story that leads us to  
understand our place and how might live in the ecosystems of the earth so that  
the whole of creation might be reconciled and renewed.

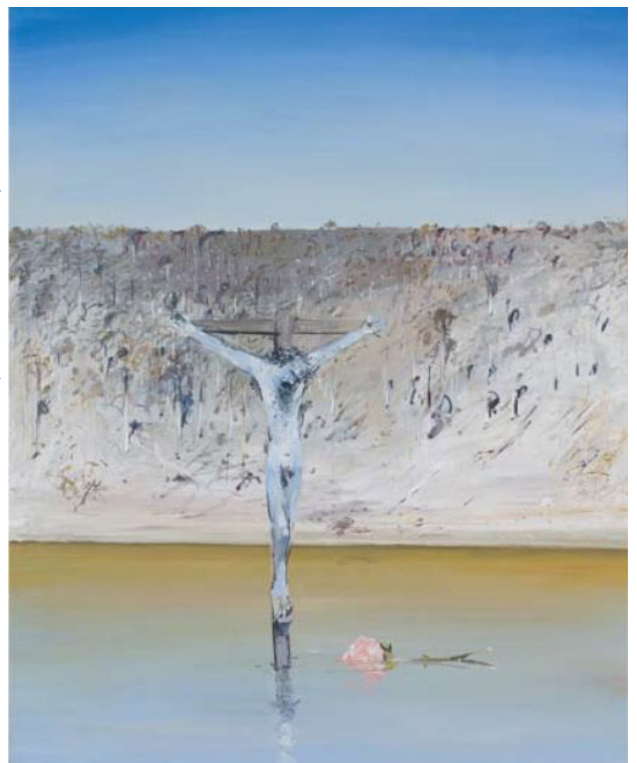
We need to pray, listen to God, ponder the scriptures, and learn, grow our new  
story, a new song for the earth.

The hope and assurance that we can have is written in Col 1: 19-20

***"For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."***

Let's look at this painting by Arthur Boyd.

Violet announces Christ in our cosmos,  
Holding our Earth in all of its pain.  
Christ now invites us: joining in my  
mission!  
Cov'nant with me to heal Earth again.



What is it trying to say about Christ and the Landscape?

Join me on a journey as I pose the question:

Has our focus on the historical Jesus been such that we have neglected the post-resurrection Jesus who is alive and with us?

By not giving spiritual attention to the Christ...the post-resurrection Jesus...the word... the logos...the cosmic Christ....have we missed what is so important in our time.... **the renewal and healing of the ecology and life support systems of the planet...**the on-going work of our loving God and creator?

In that case we can be a people of hope when faced with the huge ecological and climate change issues we face to live in a safe operating place on our planet.

We can be assured that the post-resurrection Jesus will be the wind under our wings. And join in the words of Norman Habel and say:

**Violet announces Christ in our cosmos,  
Holding our Earth in all of its pain.  
Christ now invites us: join in my mission!  
Cov'nant with me to heal Earth again.**

Can you join the journey?

# A New Climate



**Rev Simon Hansford**  
Moderator, NSW & ACT

I remember preaching for a Combined Churches' Pentecost service a few years ago. Amongst other things, I spoke of the Spirit's presence, stirring and brooding over the creation as it found shape and purpose under the articulation of God.

I then asserted the charge of the gospel to care for God's good earth and, at that point, a couple of my ecumenical colleagues laughed out loud.

This, in a rural community shaped by weather and climate, by the availability and scarcity of water, by many farmers' willing engagement in environmental options and the angry intransigence of a minority.

Is it possible we can believe that our discipleship has nothing to do with the care of the world in which we live? Have we made "salvation" so much about the heavenly rescue of an individual that we have missed the biblical imperative that we are part of God's creation and God's history – a creation and history which it is God's intention to restore?

All too easily we apply weight to one aspect and neglect the other. We can (we must!) proclaim a God who desires to restore every human being – and the creation in which all of us are held.

It is when we attempt to hold both of these faithfully together that we comprehend the challenge of what it means to bear witness in a world where the creation is under extraordinary stress. Scripture is bookended with the wonder of creation and the new creation; these images are not decorative, they are proclamation about our God, our world and our place within it.

As the drought began to break, there was a call from some in our community that we should no longer be farming cattle because of the impact of methane in the atmosphere. There are graziers who battled to keep their breeding stock alive during five years of drought, and to hear that must have been almost unbearable.

People in rural communities have been addressing the changes in the climate for years, even decades; the incoherent and ill-informed utterances from a few invested politicians are a false measure of the significant transformation in farming practices which have been undertaken.

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When we speak of caring for God's good earth, we are mindful of the land of which we are stewards, and the people whose stewardship is in their blood and bones. We must address the climate crisis before us; we cannot ignore those whose lives are woven within it.

It is not only our rural communities, of course. We have heard and seen the immediate destruction facing our neighbours in the Pacific; what does it mean to love God and to love these neighbours, as we love ourselves? Rescue from drowning islands may well be the necessary functional response to this crisis, but how does it address the deeper issues of justice and honouring those whose voices we have so long ignored, or patronised?

And what of those first voices, whose stories of creation and stewardship are millennia older than the ones we hold in scripture? How shall we honour them, and pay attention as the earth and all its creatures cry out for justice?

The escapism of some aspects of Christianity is understandable but leads us up a dry gully. There is no hope there which speaks to discipleship here, but only avoidance of responsibility.

Diminishing our role for this place, this life, dismisses the worth of each person as they work and live and serve and save and worship. We are called here. We are disciples here. Our lives bear witness to the reign of God, proclaimed in Jesus Christ – on this earth.

Our Basis of Union affirms that Jesus Christ became flesh; in Christ's life, death and resurrection, God has reasserted a claim over the whole creation. This is not only about a God who says yes to life for each human being, but a God who acts in hope and love for all creation.

The new heaven and new earth celebrated in the penultimate words of scripture are a charge for every disciple of Jesus about the inherent value of each of us – and the creation of which we are an intrinsic, eternal part.

As we wrestle with the vital transition to justice for our earth and all its creatures, our discipleship reminds us of the promise of life which is held for us in Jesus Christ. This hope is for each of us and for the whole creation, formed under the Word of God, in whom we find our life.



# News from Saltbush

**Rev. Geoff Wellington** | Saltbush Scattered Community Minister

Since the last edition of Ruminations, I have travelled across much of Australia. From the hills and mountains in the Flinders Ranges to the remote gorges of central Australia and the vast plains of western Queensland. The land and wildlife are enjoying a season of plenty and renewing its self. It is truly a magnificent, mysterious and vast land that we get to live in and enjoy.



For the Saltbush Community, Land is never far from our thoughts and it shapes so much of who we are and how we go about doing the things we do. The wonders of technology mean that the vast distances that once were so much of a barrier to interaction, support and learning are no longer such an issue. The Saltbush Café's are a good example of this. People from across State borders and across the vast area of New South Wales meet regularly to explore life and faith. Currently Tim (Saltbush) and Annie Baker (The Presbytery of the Downs – Qld) are leading a Café exploring some of the Turning Points in the Churches journey across 2000 years. As the year starts to draw to an end our thoughts will turn to Advent and once again plans are underway to gather online to contemplate the coming of the Christ Child one again.

In mid-October the Saltbush Team will lead another Saltbush Gathering at Tathra down on the south coast of NSW. We are looking forward to joining with the local Uniting Church congregation and others from the area to explore our theme for this year - Christian Community. We also look forward to hearing from Rev Glen Spencer from Uniting Mission and Education and the Canberra Region Presbytery

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Minister Rev Andrew Smith. It will be a fun day of learning about creating ways to be more intentional about Christian Community and sharing some time together. Join us in person, it would be great to be together or come along online.

Prior to the Saltbush Gathering the Saltbush Team will meet together to start planning for 2023 – scary thought we are up to that. At this stage its clear that more of the things you know and love will continue like Word Around the Bush, Café's, Ruminations and Saltbush Gatherings. We are hoping to get out and about more in 2023 as well meeting with people across the land to encourage and explore life and faith with you. If you would like the Saltbush Team to visit your Christian Community lets us know at [Saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au](mailto:Saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au) and we will plan a time that suits.

The Saltbush Team will be hosting the Candidates for Ministry in Wagga Wagga in late November along with Rev Nicole Flemming (Formation and Ministry) and others from the Uniting Theological College as together we explore ministry in rural and regional areas. Please pray for all the candidates as they study and engage with Formation for Ministry and for those leading this time.

I personally feel very blessed to be with the Saltbush Team that works so closely with you all and how the land shapes and speaks to us. In my travels I have been reminded again of what a spiritual experience it is to be in and with the land in some amazing places. But no matter where you are, the landscape is there changing with the seasons, whispering in the wind calling us to pay attention to the creation, the creator and how we live together in community.



May God bless you as you read this issue of Ruminations and contemplate how the land might speak into your life and faith

# Saltbush Relational Resources

## **Saltbush @ Worship**

At different times of the year the Saltbush team gather people from across the state and beyond for worship as Christian community. This is now streamed, one way or impersonal, but continues to build upon our belief in the missional relationship. Saltbush @ Worship takes place on different days/nights and is open to all.

## **Saltbush Cafés**

In regular series of three or four nights the Saltbush team hold online cafés centred around diverse themes or readings. Saltbush cafés are easy to attend, relaxed and an encouraging way to meet other and explore life and faith together.

## **Scattered Community Gatherings**

Three to four times a year in different rural or coastal location the Saltbush team hold Scattered Community Gatherings. You can also attend these online from wherever you are to wherever we are. These gatherings are centred around worship, encouragement, education and the practice of discipleship.

## **Word around the Bush**

Each week of the year the Saltbush team present a visual message based on the lectionary reading for that week. You are free to watch and use in your own congregation this message. You can also print off the Saltbush liturgy that is provided each week to accompany the visual message.

## **Talking about Salt**

This is our publication available for any congregation or group who are willing to have some discussion around who you are, how you gather and how you live out your faith. Talking about Salt is five difficult conversations for congregations and can also be used to shape a life and witness discussion and consultation. Talking about Salt is available free to any congregation and is available both online and in post.

## **Digital packages for congregations**

If your congregation would like a Saltbush digital package so that you can use and connect with us and the wider church please simply get in touch. A digital package includes: smart tv, mobile stand for the tv, all connectors and cables, TV, camera and our support to set it all up.

## **Visits**

The Saltbush team are always willing to visit your congregation or group to meet you, talk with you about how it is for you as a congregation or Christian community and how you seek to be part of the missional relationship with others. Simply get in touch and one of the Saltbush team will come to visit you.

Look on our website under **Word, Ruminations, Talking about Salt** or **Contact Us**.

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# Thanks for your donations to Saltbush!

Please consider financially supporting Saltbush; either as individuals or as a congregation.

Your donation will be directly used for the work of supporting Saltbush and the ways we are working to encourage congregations and people in scattered communities of faith.

You can donate generally towards Saltbush and this will include the cost of enabling the printing of Ruminations.

To donate please make a direct transfer:

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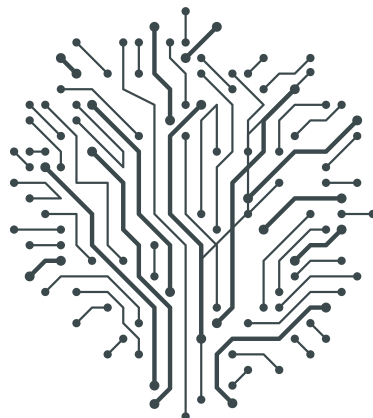
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