

For Everything there is a Season - Australia Day 2014

I've often found that the month of January, even if I'm at work, has a different feel to it than the rest of the year. There is something of a mood of the irregular, a break in routine, a re-booting of the system; a time that is a little less rigid and demanding: it's a time of 'Business as (un)Usual'.

I'm sure this is not the case for everyone, but in my small corner of the world the Australia Day long weekend signals that the month of festivities is winding up; that for 'everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven' (Ecc. 3:1). And perhaps there is no day more appropriate than 'Australia Day' to be reminded of this truth, for when the First Fleet of the British Ships arrived at Sydney Cove in 1788, one season in the lives of the First Australians was over and another was to begin.

Since that day there have been times of persecution, and times of liberation; a long season of denial, and a recent season of recognition. The celebrations of Australia Day will sit alongside the tragedy of Invasion Day, and the gratitude we might feel for living in a country free from civil war will sit alongside the cost of this peace. A friend of mine recently said that he feels that being born in Australia is like winning the lotto. When we look at the quality of our lives within a global context, I think he's spot on. But just like lotto, the jackpot is built upon the tickets of those who win nothing.

Being part of a community health organization means that we are a people passionate about justice and committed to inclusion. Our work seeks to oppose systems and cultures that create and compound disadvantage. And so we may feel somewhat divided between the 'Australia Day' and 'Invasion Day' camps. I know, at least, that I do. But I also know that when I set up one group over and against another I participate in the mentality of the invader: I practice my own tribalism that says my clan is more right and good and true and real than yours. In this I have de-humanized you and opened the floodgates to atrocity. To avoid this we must *humanize* one another, rather than create new hierarchies. If Invasion Day is an attack on Australia Day then all that has happened is a role reversal. We are still captive to the same play with the same characters.

In my world-view no one owns land; we are all only ever stewards or care-takers. And as caretakers we are called to see each person and every living thing as our brother, sister, neighbor; as a child of God, and as a vessel that carries the spark of the sacred. And as caretakers we need to be accountable for our stewardship, and because of this we must take seriously both our victories and our failures. If we take both these seriously we will find, like the royal philosopher writes in the book of Ecclesiastes, that there 'is a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance' (Ecc. 3:4).

May your long weekend be abundant in both.

Grace & Peace,

James