

Reflection by Rev John Squires at the 26th Remembrance Ceremony

I thank you for the invitation to share some thoughts with you this day.

I acknowledge the Traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, and I pay my respects to their elders, past and present, and to those emerging within community.

I also acknowledge those who have died and who we remember today and offer my condolences to those who loved them, particularly the newly bereaved.

(We then shared in a time of silent remembrance, as people recalled their loved one they were remembering.)

Today, as we remember, we recognise that we come to this ceremony from various walks of life, with various experiences, perspectives, and understandings. Our insights about life, our understandings of life in this realm and beyond, are varied. Some of us participate in rituals and in communities that help us to make sense of our lives, and of death, when it takes place. We recognise and value that diversity in our midst today. All are welcomed into this shared moment of remembering.

I join with you today as a representative of people of faith, for whom the loss of life of a loved one is a special moment. It stands as a moment for remembering, grieving, giving thanks for a life, mourning the loss of relationship and connection. No matter what faith tradition, each religion marks such a moment with a sensitive rite of passage, as the person deceased slips away from our reality, into another reality beyond. We gather to remember, grieve, recall with thanks, and comfort one another.

In this time of remembrance today, we mark again those moments of passage for our loved ones—those we have named, and countless others not here named—who have taken that pathway into the beyond. We bring out of the shadows the names and faces, the joys and griefs, the achievements and the unfulfilled hopes, of those who have gone from us.

I join with you as a Christian minister, from a faith community that holds firmly to the conviction that, whilst death is the end of mortal life, it marks a new beginning in our relationship with God. We do not know with clarity and assurance what form that new relationship takes; but we hold with hope to the belief that this life is not the totality of our human existence.

In this time of remembrance today, each of us, in terms of our own personal commitment of faith and hope, grieves the loss of a loved one, yet affirms our hope that their reality, now, has taken them away from the grip of whatever caught them, surrounded them, and led them to the point of death. Beyond those shadows, we hold to the belief that our loved ones live in the light.

And I join with you as a member of the Uniting Church, which has a commitment to stand in support of those who have been bereaved in this situation. In recent years, the Uniting Church has developed the Fair Treatment campaign, in which we join with over 60 partner

organisations, and many concerned individuals, to affirm that our policies and our laws must not stigmatise and marginalise the most disadvantaged people in our community. This is a vitally important commitment. (See <https://www.fairtreatment.org>)

The man who shapes the perspective of the world that I adhere to and seek to follow in my life is the man from Nazareth who sat, befriended, listened, questioned, encouraged, challenged, enriched, expanded horizons. This man from Nazareth would not validate the harsh, uncaring, depersonalising course of action that many of your loved ones have experienced as they grappled with drug dependency, suicidal ideation, or the intensified pain that came with age and disability.

By trusting in the way of the man of Nazareth, I place my faith in the positive and hopeful dimension of humanity. That man, Jesus, affirmed what the sages of old had long declared: we human beings are made in the image of God. Our very beings “radiate the glory of God”, to use the ancient scriptural terminology.

At our own creation, the breath of God was breathed into us, infusing our being with all that God is, all that God offers. Our very beings contain within them the potential to be life-affirming, world-embracing, in hope-filled living, in loving relationships, in caring compassion. Each human being therefore needs to be accorded dignity and respect, as a person bearing the mark of the divine, with the breath of the divine inspiring and enabling our very being.

In my understanding, this high view of humanity undergirds the work of the [Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform](#). A commitment to the value of each individual human life informs the advocacy, the research, the educational work, the relational support, and this annual remembering, of this so-important organisation. We are made in the image of God. We have within us the capacity to be our very best.

Let us continue to hope, to love, to work, to care; to advocate, to persuade, and to rejoice, in this work.