

**NAIDOC 2018 celebrates the invaluable contributions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have made – and continue to make - to our communities, our families, our rich history and to our nation.**

As pillars of our collective society, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have played – and continue to play - active and significant roles at the community, local, state and national levels. It was great to see Evonne Goolagong-Cawley in Geraldton recently to inspire the next generation of Aboriginal kids.

As leaders, politicians, activists and social change advocates, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women fought, and continue to fight, for justice, equal rights, rights to country, for law and justice, access to education, employment and to maintain and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, language, music and art.

**Sadly, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women's role in cultural, social and political survival has often been invisible, unsung or diminished. Rejection by the culture being the key contributor. [Source, NAIDOC website]**

I want to digress for a moment to parallel a story of that speaks into cultural rejection.

A story found in John 4:18

The Samaritan woman at the well. In Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic traditions, she is venerated as a saint with the name Photine (also Photini, Photina, meaning "the luminous one").

Firstly, it's important to consider the context in which this story took place. The Samaritans were half-Jew, half-Gentile. The race came about after the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C. People from the nation of Israel stayed behind. These people intermarried with the Assyrians producing the Samaritans.

In the eyes of the Jews of the time, to call a person a Samaritan was the meanest racial slur one could give, the Samaritans were seen as an impure race, with an impure religion hated by the purists or elitists. Cultural and ethnically rejected by the more dominant culture.

Jesus was alone at a well, as the Disciple's had gone to get food. A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. What Jesus did was counter cultural.

He simply asked her for a drink.

She was shocked. Why would he, a Jew, ask her, a Samaritan, for a drink of water? Especially considering she was a woman.

*John 4:7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)*

*9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.[a])*

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

16 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

17 "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

21 "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

25 The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

26 Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

Then the disciples returned to see Jesus talking to her, they were taken aback.

Now this woman was astute, Jesus exposed her failure in relationships and she deflected away from herself to the religious divisions of the day and the debates over which places are holy.

Jesus is a master at disclosing a persons heart. He had already exposed to her, that her real problem was not the division between religious sects but her own damaged heart.

"You have had five husbands" He said, the man you now have is not your husband" Jesus spoke to her the truth that only she could know.

She ran back to her village and said “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did!”

*“Could this be the Messiah!?” (Verse 4:29)*

What she says next is the most fascinating line in this story that usually goes unnoticed and unstated –she said this “and he didn’t reject me”

Think about this, which religion today would have chosen this woman as their first evangelist, think about it. Not Islam, not a typical Hindu man Not even traditional Christianity the way our power brokers have distorted it.

Jesus rescued her from her self-condemnation, not from the wars within religion but from the war and rejection from within herself. Because he didn’t reject her.

I want to come back now to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait women of today. Keep in mind what was in her mind - remember, what stood in her mind was this man, visually to her a Jew, a prophet representing the elite. He did not reject her.

Today we are celebrating ‘because of her’, In order for some of you to embrace the celebration and do that, you have to be willing to walk in the shoes of what it’s like to be rejected by a culture, you must be willing to ‘learn’ what uniqueness of culture is and why barriers have been built up preventing acceptance of others that are different. Today I ask all of you to observe your thoughts, listen and be willing to learn from our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls, and women. Celebrate with them.

Racial discrimination and gender discrimination are as strong today as they were for the woman at the well.

Yet, race and gender are the two things that one does not choose for oneself. God chooses.

God does not make mistakes, so today we celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and these women in our culture, unique and not rejected. Accepted, worthy and with work to do to transform our culture to the glory of God our Father.

This, is “Learning God’s Way”.