

If you have visited the Victorian regional city of Shepparton, you will have seen murals and statues of significant Yorta Yorta men and women. This one portrays Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls and his great uncle William Cooper. Some of us may be familiar with the name, Doug Nicholls, champion AFL footballer, activist for justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, leader in the Churches of Christ, and for a short time in the 1970s Governor of South Australia – the only indigenous person ever appointed to such a position.

But it is William Cooper, I wish to focus on. William Cooper, a Yorta Yorta man, and a Christian, baptised in the Methodist Church, rose to prominence in the first half of the twentieth century as a leader of his people, and an outspoken critic of the discrimination and injustice suffered by Indigenous Australians. He organised the Day of Mourning on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1938, 150 years after the first fleet arrived at Botany Bay, and wrote a petition to King George VI, monarch of the British Empire, protesting the discrimination and theft of land suffered by his people and other Aboriginal nations. The petition read in part:

It was not only a moral duty, but also a strict injunction included in the commission issued to those who came to people Australia that the original occupants and we, their heirs and successors, should be adequately cared for. Instead, our lands have been expropriated.

While his petition attracted almost 2000 signatures, the Federal Government of Australia, refused to forward the petition to King George.

But William Cooper's concern for oppressed persons was not limited to his own people, not limited to indigenous Australians. His compassion and his active campaigning extended beyond Australian shores. In December 1938, William Cooper organised a protest march that demonstrated outside the German Consulate in Melbourne.

A few weeks earlier in Germany widespread rioting and looting against Jews prompted William to write a letter condemning 'cruel persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi government in Germany'. Of course, the German officials refused to accept the letter, but according to Wikipedia, this protest was likely the only one of its kind in the world.

I think that this action taken by William Cooper is evidence of a trinitarian faith: a faith that looks beyond the needs of me and mine to embrace the one who is other, the stranger, the ones of another faith; a love that knows no bounds.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, "you do not know where the wind blows or where it comes from, so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit". William Cooper, I like to think, was born of the Spirit, who inspired him to take action for people of another faith, on the other side of the world, because he knew what it was to suffer. That same Spirit is with us; calling us to a love that knows no bounds, that feels the suffering of those who are oppressed, dispossessed, or discriminated against.