

Tonight is a holy night of sacred stories marked out on the landscape of human experience. Tonight is a holy night of sacred stories that locate us as the people of God at a certain point on the way to our place of true origin – sacred stories that locate where we have been and where we are going. This holy night is filled with sacred stories that straddle what was and what will be.

We can hear about some of the places we have been in the Old Testament. We hear stories of our beginning in creation, of our enslavement and oppression, of our redemption and salvation out of bondage into new territory. We hear a prophet calling us home from exile, calling us back to our true home when we have become disoriented, dislocated, displaced. The Old Testament is bursting with survival stories, most of them are complicated stories involving oppression, injustice, a struggle to survive, fulfillment of promises. Our times are also bursting with complicated stories of survival.

One of my favorite stories of survival takes us to Australia. It is the story of a fourteen year old girl named Molly Craig<sup>i</sup> who leads her young sister and cousin out of a residential school where they have been forcibly placed after being ripped from the arms of their Aborigine mothers and grandmother. Aborigines are the people who are original to the land, and like Native Americans in the United States or First Nations People in Canada, they have experienced much oppression. In 1931, after 100 years of resistance against white settlement of their land, Aboriginal people found their lives falling into the hands of a white government. The chief official in charge was committed to maintaining racial purity and was intimately involved in the lives of those of mixed descent. As is his policy, he forcibly removes three mixed race girls from their home – their mothers wailing and ripping at their clothing in distress. Their fathers are nowhere to be seen. They were white men who came through the region briefly as laborers set to the task of building the world's longest fence, a fence to keep rabbits from destroying grazing land for the cattle belonging to settlers. This rabbit-proof fence stretched 1500 miles across the Australian landscape.

Stuck in the residential school, Molly's drive to get home overwhelms the possibility of capture and punishment. She initiates their escape on a rainy day, knowing that tracks will be lost in the rainfall. On multiple occasions they outwit the Aborigine tracker and the white policemen who seek to return them to the school, where mixed race children are trained to be productive labor for white society. Molly leads an escape that takes 9 weeks and crosses 1200 miles using the rabbit-proof fence as a marker. They survive on the land and the kindnesses of a few people they meet along the way- Aborigine and white. They keep their way along this unmistakable fence that leads all the way home. This fence, this long rabbit-proof fence, leads them through some of the harshest country on earth to that place where their mothers continue to cry for them and dream of their return, leaning on the fence in their distress. Their courage and their

deep longing to return home moves them forward along the miles and miles of fence even in deep thirst and hunger.

Like Molly and so many others in these stolen generations, people of all times and places have been dislocated by others. Stolen generations are not peculiar to Australia – many nations, including our own, can confess to such sins. We have been dislocated by the sin of racial and economic injustice. We have been displaced by the death-dealing ways of greed and oppression.

Even today in this place, where we live with a certain amount of power, privilege and security, we know what it means to be stuck in a place in which we never meant to find ourselves. We long to be free of bondage and despair. Disconnected, distanced, and dislocated- we hunger and thirst to find that true, original home, where the arms of the one who gave us life ache to hold us once again. Where there is peace and plenty and justice. To get there, we need only to locate that long, unmistakable fence that is Jesus Christ, the way of salvation and our way home. A marker that generates hope and courage.

This fourteen year girl, Molly Craig, made it home. Her hope and courage took her across 1200 miles on foot – back to her mother’s arms. Back home, where she belonged. She made it home. We will make it home. We will follow the marker of Jesus Christ into our true home.

Katherine, Molly Rose and Zachariah, you are so wonderfully small and new! You may not recall the sensations of the water and oil marking you on this holy night as Christ’s own forever. Yet you will know your true origin, your true home, lies in your baptism, that your life originates in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Others will point you to this sign of your salvation as you grow and make your own way. Others will guide you to it like an unmistakable marker across the landscape of your lives leading you from places of dislocation toward your true origin in the God who creates you and loves you. On this holy night we will also baptize Stu, who has lived long enough to know that one requires courage and hope along the way. Stu, you have sought out the way to your home in God. You have arrived at the fence, the long but unmistakable fence that will guide you to the arms of the same God who has been calling you home. Claim the presence of the Risen Christ as your guide, as your way home.

Tonight, on this holiest of nights, we celebrate **our** salvation story as the beloved people of God. We celebrate our salvation in the resurrected one who straddles what was and what will be, in the resurrected one who straddles death and life, in the resurrected one who stretches from the place of our origin to the depths of our dislocation and provides a marker back home again. For tonight we join with our resurrected Christ to trample down death and move forward in our salvation story toward the life that God has been calling us into since the very creation of the world.

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<sup>i</sup> Molly Craig’s daughter, Doris Pilkington Garimara, wrote the story of her mother’s escape from Moore River School in the 1930s. The story was made into a film by Phillip Noyce called “Rabbit-Proof Fence,” distributed by Buena Vista Home Entertainment on dvd. The film is rated PG for emotional thematic material.