

## Into all the world – Reflections for Lent 2021

**Week 3 – 7th March**  
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### A Wilderness Experience

At the beginning of planning the holiday of a lifetime it's possibly not high on your list of priorities to plan in your own 'wilderness' experience' but on a recent trip to Australia, from standing in the cool waters of the Pacific Ocean to basking in the glories of the Indian Ocean, I experienced just that. My holiday included a four day train excursion from Sydney to Perth (almost 3000 miles) across the Nullarbor Plain - the outback! This hot barren plateau is twice the size of England and took over 24 hours to cross. We went to sleep in the foothills of Adelaide and awoke to sun rise across the desert plain and at this point the enormity of the expanse and the reality of wilderness really began to sink in.

Day three of the journey and with almost 1000 miles still to go until Perth, we arrived at the small outback town of Cook - population 4! The centre of Cook is labelled as 'the middle of nowhere' and it is here that the train stops to refuel, take on water and deliver supplies to the town-people whose entire existence there is to provide service for the trains. Standing there in total isolation, but with the comfort and trappings of the 21st century yards away on the luxurious train, the enormity of the risks, the challenges and the sheer bravery of the early pioneers who stepped into this vast wilderness really became apparent. The men and women who led the initial journeys into this unforgiving territory had no way of knowing whether they would return to civilisation safely, and for many this pilgrimage was one of exploration, education and bold vision to unite the two sides of this great continent.

As I looked around the barren landscape at Cook and encountered the locals living their life choice I found a depth of gratitude for any individual willing to sacrifice a life of companionship to provide service for others in this way. Whenever any of us step into the unknown we often do it with an idea fixed in our mind of what we might encounter and how we can change - either ourselves or others, but often it is while we are in a 'wilderness' experience and at our most vulnerable that we do truly encounter the glory of a God of creation, the power of a Father who strengthens and the love of Saviour who remains with us - no matter how isolated or alone we might feel. Just like the great train being refuelled with diesel and water at Cook this journey was a time and opportunity to recharge, to reflect and to BE.



**To Ponder:** When have you had the opportunity for a wilderness moment - and did it come unexpectedly? When the world, or your journey, has seemed particularly inhospitable have you experienced gracious service, or have you had the opportunity to serve?

**Prayer:** *Loving Lord God, wherever we go and however far we travel we have the confidence to know you are beside us for every step and have prepared a route for us. Throughout history you have journeyed with the earliest pioneers and pilgrims to allow your gospel to be known and your grace to be shared. In our wilderness moments help us see the beauty around us and appreciate all those who we encounter in their loving service for your glory, Amen.*

**Bible Link: Psalm 95**

**Hymn: *Singing the Faith* 469:** I watch the sunrise lighting the sky