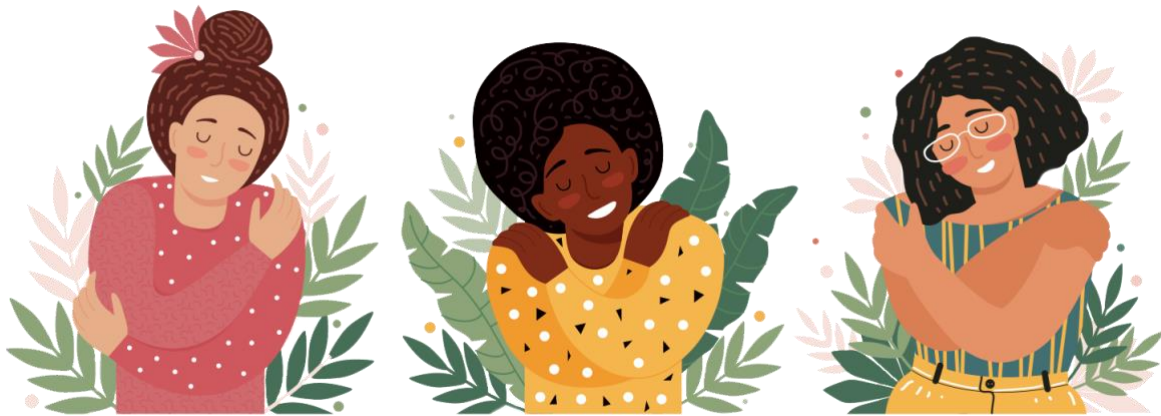


**Thought for the day – Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

**By Jill Howard-Gunasekera**

**International Women’s Day - Together we are Strong**

International Women’s Day, held each year on 8 March, provides a focused opportunity to celebrate the achievement of women, to consider the contemporary, social and economic concerns of women and to seek for justice for women all over the world. This year’s theme is to embrace gender equity and women are being invited to use a gesture - to put each of your hands on your opposite shoulder as if giving yourself a hug or embrace. (Picture below is taken from [Mother’s Union!](#))



I do love the gesture. It is made all the more profound, for me, as I’ve been reading again, the demands made by groups of girls and young women who were asked on International Women’s Day in 2020 what they wanted for women and girls everywhere.

These are some of the things they said:

- from girls and young women in Burundi

We demand an end to rape and abuse of women and girls  
We demand access to opportunities and learning skills that will be relevant to careers we want to pursue.

- from girls and young women in South Africa

We demand an education system that allows us freedom to explore our

various skills and talents

We demand full acknowledgement and respect of women in positions of power.

We Demand a justice system that does not tolerate gender-based violence

- from girls and young women in India

We have to create gender equality between boys and girls

We have to abolish girl child marriage

Isn't it interesting how similar they are, and how universal the desire for education is. How for those who feel inequality so keenly – education is such a longed-for goal.

And how sadly relevant all these demands continue to be. But let's keep hearing them.

Malala Yousafzai, Pakistan female education activist and Nobel Prize Laureate, gave us this eloquent thought:

'Extremists have shown what frightens them most – a girl with a book'.

Who cannot hear these words without remembering the girls and young women of Afghanistan and Iran today.

Here's a link to an [Australian Liturgy for International Women's Day](#). I hope you'll take a moment of quiet reflection today to share in it.

Here's also a link to a powerful song by Grace Petrie '[The losing side](#)' which I hope you enjoy.

All of these in their own ways help to celebrate women, through a loving gesture, voices speaking up in the wilderness of inequality and oppression, and protest songs giving voice to the 'fire' that won't die, as we continue to push to create the future voiced above, by the young women of Burundi, South Africa and India.