

## REFLECTING ON THE TREATY OF WAITANGI

If you are in a cross-cultural marriage, you have to accept the culture the other person brings to the relationship. Their culture is part of who they are. If you married someone who is very different, the challenge of your marriage is accepting the other person for who they are. Often the very thing that attracts us to the person is also what causes the conflict down the track

Of course, in some marriages, one person imposes their way onto the relationship. However, we recognize that is not healthy. Good marriages learn to accept the other person as they are and figure out ways to work together, with lots of compromise, discussion and honouring of the other person.

Is this a sermon about marriage? No, it is leading in to reflecting on Waitangi Day. For many it is just a day off. However, Waitangi Day is a celebration of the Treaty that was signed between Maori and the British Crown. At its simplest, it was a recognition of two cultures and an agreement to mutual respect.

Maori saw it as a spiritual covenant, similar to the covenants of the Bible. Christian civil servants in England who had seen the terrible injustices of colonization on indigenous people promoted it. As Christians, we should celebrate this amazing heritage. However, within months of it being signed it was being broken. Land was confiscated. Maori language was suppressed. Innocent people were imprisoned and killed for trying to stand up for their rights. The economic wellbeing of Maori today can be directly traced back the actions of the 1800s

It was being broken because one culture was imposing itself on the other. In a sense, it was like an abusive marriage. If you have an unhealthy relationship then we all know this is not a good place to bring children into. Some of you here today are children of the treaty as it were. You here are from different countries. Maybe you don't see the treaty applying to you. You might have settled here many years ago and made a real effort to fit in. However, the treaty is relevant to all of us.

If you see the treaty being honoured and Maori culture being honoured and respected, then you know your culture will also be respected if the parents are respectful of each other then it is a safe place to bring others. The foundation of our country is one of

mutual respect for differences. This is then become the foundation for multi culturalism. There is more than one way to see the world. There is more than one way to do things. Culture is often not a matter of right of wrong. It is a matter of difference.

In the early church, the biggest challenge they faced was one of culture. We read of this in Acts 15 at the Council of Jerusalem. The dominant culture was Jewish. It was into Jewish culture that Jesus predominately ministered. Some exceptions made his heart for all people clear. However, generally Jesus preached and taught to the Jews.

Pentecost revealed God's multi-cultural heart. God fearing Jews of every nation gathered and heard the believers speaking in their own language. Some have seen this as a reversal of Babel, where people were scattered by language. Now the Spirit of God unites people.

However, even after Pentecost the disciples stuck to Jerusalem and held their cultural prejudices. They struggled to see their own racism. Peter has that encounter in Acts 10 where in a dream he is told to eat non-kosher food and he refuses. Three times God tells him to eat and he refuses. Just then a delegation comes asking him to come to go to a Italian's house, a man who is a Gentile captain in the Roman army. This was totally culturally unthinkable. No good Jew would do this, but because of the dream Peter goes. There is a second Pentecost experience, an outpouring of the Spirit on the Gentiles gathered.

But as Gentiles started coming to faith there was a big debate that nearly split the church and it was around culture. Should the Gentile converts become Jewish? Should the church look Jewish in form? Should new believers observe Jewish cultural norms?

The Jewish majority wanted to impose their culture on the rest. They were the strongest. They were the culture that birthed Christianity. So naturally, Christians should become Jewish. It took much pain, and prayer and discussion before Paul could state there is neither Jew nor Gentile. Ephesians 2:14-22

Now this was not a denial of culture. Paul was not saying you need to ditch your Jewish culture and become Christian culture. We cannot deny our culture. He was saying these issues of gender; race



and status are not to be divisive. They are not to become walls. They are walls even today. Some churches do not allow women to be leaders in the church. That is a wall. Many churches are predominately one culture. That suggests there is a wall. Some churches do not see the treaty is relevant or important. That is a wall. Galatians 3:26-29

We see in Revelation 7:9-10 God's community gathered. Race has not been extinguished in heaven. Clearly different cultures were being celebrated. They could be recognized.

Waitangi Day is a celebration of two cultures agreeing to honour and respect one another the majority culture would not trample over the minority culture. However, would honour and respect Maori culture and land and treasures and language.

Whether you realize it or not, you are a product of your culture. Who I am comes from my heritage. We do not need to deny our culture but celebrate it.

New Zealand is slowly coming to see that we signed the treaty but then have expected everything to be done the British way. To be an NZer is to be bi cultural. That is what it means to be a New Zealander. It is a nation born in a partnership between two cultures. Many of us have so used to being the dominant culture that we often struggle to understand what it feels like to be in the minority.

Regardless of your culture, the Treaty gives you a place, a home. It is a document born out of Christian values of honouring one another. It is a document of reconciliation. Waitangi day is an opportunity to reflect:

1. **On our own cultural heritage.** Celebrate the good things of your culture. Reject what does not line up with the Word of God. Celebrate the Treaty, a product of earlier Christians.
2. **On our own racism.** This might sound insulting. However, the definition of racism believes our culture is better than others are. We all do this to some extent. We often are guilty of casual racism. The comments about the use of Te Reo are often a good indication of people's attitude. We are a bi cultural nation and using Te Reo, and speaking names properly is honouring to Maori. If someone pronounces my name wrong all the time,

God is a treaty making God, and as followers of Christ, we should be the first to understand and

honour the Treaty. Is the Holy Spirit speaking to you about your own attitudes?

3. **On how we interact with other cultures.** How can we welcome the stranger in our midst? When Jesus said in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31ff), "If you welcome the stranger, you welcome me" we tend to think of stranger as someone like me who I do not know. Actually, the word "stranger" is for someone from a different country or culture. When we show hospitality to those from different cultures and invite them into our homes, we are welcoming Jesus. If we are to grow in what God is calling us to, we need to begin to open our heart and homes to the stranger. Right here in our midst

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## REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

What does Waitangi Day mean to you?

How have your attitudes to the Treaty changed over the years?

What are the positives and negatives of your cultural heritage? Of your family heritage?

Have you encountered racism personally? Alternatively, have you seen casual racism at work? Have you identified any of your own racism? Are we all racist to some extent?

Why does Jesus so strongly identify with the foreigner in the parable of the sheep and goats? What are the implications for us?



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