

WAITANGI DAY 2023

Welcome to Waitangi Day weekend. This is a day when we celebrate a unique treaty – really the only one of its kind in the world. Despite what secular media tell us, this is a Treaty that was birthed out of Christianity and that the early missionaries were the midwife of.

So as Christians we should celebrate this treaty. While there is much to grieve in our nation's history as the treaty was broken, there is also much to celebrate that it has now been restored to its rightful place. As Christians we should celebrate setting up of the Waitangi tribunal, seeking to bringing justice where there has been profound injustice.

I want to tell some stories today. I think it is important we here stories of what God has done in New Zealand in the past. We have an appalling lack of knowledge about the history of the church in NZ. We know about how God interacted with Israel, yet we have little understanding of how God has worked in NZ. We must understand our own history if we are to look to the future.

In Western thought, the idea of future is to project ourselves forward, to imagine what might be. But the Hebrew idea of the future is almost the opposite. "abarith" It literally means backward. For the Hebrews the concept of time is like a person rowing a boat. They face the past, but the future is towards their back. They back into the future, which is entirely unknown, as it is behind them.

This is the same as the Māori concept that is summed up in a Proverb. Look to the past, move forward to the future. Often translated We walk into the future backwards.

The idea of "well just let the past be the past" is wrong. The past influences us. The past matters. We remember the cross as an historical event that influences our future. The treaty is not just part of our NZ history. It is a critical part of the history of the church in NZ and it is relevant today.

Story 1. Toiroa was a Māori seer. This might bother our thinking because he spoke well before any missionaries arrived in NZ. God is quite capable of speaking outside of our narrow box. He prophesied that a new people would arrive in NZ with ships and carts and horses. He didn't know the names of these things but he drew pictures and tried to demonstrate what he has seen with models. He took all of these things around the local villages, explaining them including the village where Cook would make his first landing. But here is the amazing thing. Toiroa, 3 years before Cook arrived, said this. **"The name of their God will be Son who was killed. A good God. But the people will still be oppressed."** Wow. Did you know that story. God preparing the way for the gospel in NZ.

It was 48 years later before the first sermon was preached in NZ on Christmas Day 1814. Ruatara had become friends with Marsden in Sydney, and had prepared the way for the

first sermon by telling the other chiefs. So there was lots of interest. But Marsden saw himself as bringing civilization to NZ. He believed the Māori could not embrace Christianity until they were civilized. So he sent a builder, blacksmith, rope maker to NZ first to each European ways. Marsden like Cook saw the Māori as savages. He could not separate out his culture from the gospel. Part of the oppression prophesied about was trying to bring a European gospel.

Story 2. In 1834 William Colenso arrived with a printing press. It took him and Williams Williams 3 years work to print the first Bible extracts of 5000 copies. There was a huge hunger among Māori to get their hands on this book. One person walked 250 miles to get hold of a Bible. 20 years of mission work had produced very few converts. But from 1835 to 1845 64000 mauri were attending church services. 110 000 58% of all Maori in NZ !! **Revival**

Missionaries in the Waikato by the names of Alfred and Charlotte Brown had been in the area since 1835 with very little fruit. But one person who had come to Christ was chief. Ngakuku. He had a gospel of Luke that the Brown's had given him. His daughters name was Tarore. She kept this precious gospel in a little woven bag. During a time of tribal warfare, Ngakuku and his family and a few others refused to fight but instead fled camping overnight in the Kaimai ranges. They got raided by a war party. All escaped except Ngakuku's little girl Taorore. He found her the next day, clubbed to death. But as he cradled her body, he noticed her little woven bag was empty. Someone had stolen the book of Luke. He took his daughter back to his village and buried her. But he refused to seek utu, saying he would forgive instead. This totally shocked both the village.

It set off this powerful chain reaction of grace that rolled down the country. The man who had killed Tarore was Uita. When he returned to this village he happened to meet a make called Ripahau. The missionaries had taught him how to read, and so he began to read the stolen gospel to Uita. Uita was convicted and sought out Ngakuku, the father of Tarore to ask for forgiveness.

Meantime Ripahau returned to his home in Otaki. Although he had not yet come to faith, to keep practicing his literacy, he read the gospel to anyone who would listen. Some were very suspicious but others began to take notice. Two men came to faith. Tamihana Te Rauparah who was the son of a very revered chief and his cousin

In 1839 the two cousins got on boat and went the bay of Island to plead for a missionary. Henry Williams did not have anyone suitable. But the two dug their heels in and said they would not return without one. Octavius Hadfield overheard the conversation and offered to go. He was very young and severely asthmatic. Basically said. I don't have long to live so I might as well go and die there. So he was



ordained and sent to Otaki. A Māori priest cursed him and much to the amazement of the locals, a few days later the priest died. That earned him high respect. When he had his first prayer meeting 1000 people turned up.

In 1842 Tamihana and his cousin went to the south Island where his father had slaughtered thousands of people. His father was disgusted with him, but he basically went preaching a message of peace and forgiveness's That is the power the gospel

Let me introduce you to another hero of the faith that most of us have never heard of. Piripi Taumata -a Kura lived on the East coast of NZ Captured by Nga Puhī in the muskets raids of 1820's and taken to Northland. He was mistreated as a lower caste member and sought refuge at the Mission station of Henry Williams. He was amazed to see his language in written form and became motivated to learn to read and write. The story of Christ radically changed him.

In 1833 a storm blew a ship from his hometown into Nga Puhī territory in Northland, just happened to be near the mission station. Nga Puhī captured all the leaders on board, planning to make them slaves as well but Henry Williams managed to talk the chiefs out of this idea. Instead the leaders got Bible teaching. The gospel was also beginning to influence Nga Puhī as well, and 8 months later they decided to let them all go, including Piripi Taumata a Kura who by that stage had been there 10 years.

They all caught a boat and arrived back home. Obviously people were amazed to see them after 8 months and astounded to see Taumata -a Kura after 10 years.

What was the first thing that he did? The very first night he was back he organized a prayer meeting and sent word around all the neighboring villages that there would be a meeting the next night and he would tell his story.

New years day 1834 Taumata a Kura preached the first sermon on the East coast, and shared the gospel. From memory he taught what he knew and he taught the people to read and write. He and the rest of the leaders went up and down the east coast teaching what it meant to follow Jesus.

His mana was enhanced by the story of him going into battle. He was not at all keen to fight against this other tribe, with which his people had a long feud. But he came under huge pressure by his people. So eventually he did, but only after he had convinced all the other warriors to adopt a code of conduct reflected Christian values. No cannibalism. Show mercy to those who were injured. Don't destroy their enemies crops. They agreed to this, and Taumata emerged from the battle unscathed by the bullets whizzing around him. His conduct and bravery and trust in God earned him huge respect from his people who began to accept his message

Taumata a Kura preached up and down the coast, and saw churches spring up all over the place. When the missionaries arrived in 1838, he had been at it for 4 years.

William Williams had heard stories and come to see for themselves. *A great work has been accomplished in which the hand of the Lord has been signally manifest. It has not been through the labor of your missionaries, for the word has only been preached by native teachers. We had literally stood still to see the salvation of the Lord.*

Taumata a Kura should be a name that we know in NZ church as a hero of the faith.

Why am I telling you these stories? The treaty is about a partnership between two peoples and two cultures. Sometimes you hear Christians say. There is only one culture now – a Biblical culture. But there is no thing as a biblical culture. All cultures and world views must be evaluated against the Bible. But there is not a singular Biblical world view or culture. Much of Acts and the NT is grappling with the idea that new Christians did not have to follow Jewish cultural practices. The apostles who were steeped in centuries' of Jewish tradition struggled to get their heads around this.

Sometimes you hear people say. "Praise God There is neither Jew nor Gentile we are all one now." But whose "one" are we? Often it is assumed the one is a Western one. Many of us are Pakeha. We tend to think we are normal and that cultural is for minority groups. But we are not cultural. When we do experience other cultures we tend to see them as inferior to our own.

Many kiwis feel alienated by Māori culture. We feel displaced because we feel we don't have a culture. If elements of Māori culture are brought into church we feel alienated because church is meant to be for us. We are not used to feeling on the outer or in the minority. And yet for centuries this is how Māori have felt, as they have been forced to follow Western cultural rules.

Everything is spiritual and everything is cultural. Church can't escape culture. It is reflected in our buildings, style of worship, leadership structures. Everything is cultural. Trouble is that we often connect how we do things with God and the Bible, and so it must be right, rather than see it as a cultural expression.

It takes humility to enter into a different culture. Jesus entered a Jewish culture. In humility he entered our world

We need to hear the stories of the church in NZ We need to hear of the power of the gospel. We need to hear of the deep betrayal Māori felt from the church in losing their land. We need to see the mistakes the early missionaries made as well as the successes. Unless we understand our past we cannot move into the future with any success.

Henry Williams the man who translated the treaty has sometimes been portrayed as tricking Māori with his translation. But he was a man of great integrity would deeply enter the Māori world. He did not follow the lead of Marsden when he arrived by focusing on skills. Instead he reoriented the missionary work towards language and



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culture. He furiously opposed the Wakefield's and the NZ company whose sole motive was greed.

He spent all night wrestling with how to translate the treaty. He took Hobsons draft and translated it using concept Māori could understand. The English version we have today is not Captain Hobsons draft but a translation of Henry's Māori version.

Henry Williams should also be celebrated as a hero of the faith. The Wakefield's stoked accusations against Henry Williams and he was sacked by the Church Mission Society. Four years later he was reinstated but was deeply wounded. He died deeply disillusioned by the Crown's failure to honour the treaty. He understood that the treaty and the reputation of the gospel were intrinsically linked. His last words on his death bed were How cruel how cruel.

My prayer is that each of us would take the time to understand our own story in NZ.

It is only when we deeply enter into another's story, can we truly understand them.

Māori understand our culture because they have been forced to operate in it for 200 years.

Are we willing to understand Māori culture so we can truly honour the partnership this nation was founded on.

Are we willing to see that actually our Western culture has many good things but also many things that are not good, things that have led to much harm to people and our land and our churches.

Are we willing to learn from another culture.?

As Christians in NZ we should be at the forefront of honoring the treaty. That means we all have to go on a journey. This can be scary, humbling, confusing at times. It means we have to confront our prejudices and the racism that we all have.

Maybe we should be like Jesus who Paul said

"Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(Philippians 2:3–11, NLT)

We are to consider other cultures better than our own. We need to act with humility, not thinking our culture is the only way or the best way, just as Jesus left the culture of heaven to enter into the Jewish culture. Note because of Jesus' action people of every tongue (culture) will make up the kingdom, all under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

Where do you think you are at in the bi cultural journey?
On a continuum, where would you be?

Haven't started ----- Comfortable in both cultures

How much do you know of the role of Christianity in the treaty ?

How important do you feel it is to honour the treaty? Why do you hold this view?

What do you find difficult about issues around the treaty?

What excites you about the stories of our church past in NZ?

What can we learn from our past?

How can we as a pre dominantly Pakeha church honour the Treaty?



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