

a sermon preached on the

Feast of St Luke

Patronal Festival & Confirmation

18 October 2007

at

St Luke's in the City, Christchurch

by The Right Reverend Dr David Coles

Bishop of Christchurch

Lections: 2 Timothy 4: 5–8; Luke 10: 1–9

Grace and peace to you from God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The news media have been obsessed with the so-called “Terrorism raids” over the last few days since the police, dressed in anti-terrorism gear, arrested several people in the Eastern Bay of Plenty – in the Urewera’s and searched houses and vehicles across NZ after 18 months of monitoring and surveillance. The primary focus seems to have been Tame Iti, the Maori sovereignty activist with full facial tattoo and a reputation for rather extreme protest action – including baring his buttocks in front of VIPs and shooting the NZ flag at a Waitangi Tribunal meeting in 2005. Civil liberties groups and other legitimate protest groups have been crying “foul” and wondering why such extreme actions have been taken and locals from the area are still reeling from the apparent heavy handed tactics to search school buses and seal off roads. Others are staunchly supporting the police action and saying we must trust the police who wouldn’t have taken such extreme action without due cause!

In 1987 I was on sabbatical leave in Geneva, having dinner with an official of the WCC when a media message came through that there had been an armed military coup in Fiji by Colonel Rambuka. That was 20 years ago and now we have become accustomed to military coups in Fiji. But we are not so accustomed to military style actions in quiet, law abiding Aotearoa NZ – especially in the depths of the beautiful Urewera National Park and Lake Waikaremoana!

I guess many modern Pakeha will be unaware of the extraordinary history of Maori-Pakeha relationships in this part of Aotearoa/NZ – the Ureweras. There is no doubt in my mind that Tame Iti, who is described as an Ambassador for the Tuhoe tribe, is simply carrying on a very old protest against Pakeha domination and confiscation [or Raupatu] of lands which are still the subject of Waitangi Tribunal land claims. Many will not be aware that the Ringatu Maori religion which developed a little over 100 years ago dates back to another Maori activist and Maori prophet – Te Kooti. Rua Kenana was the successor to Te Kooti and set up an independent government in the same place as Tame Iti was arrested the other day – in Ruatoki. Rua was based at Maungapohatu – the sacred mountain of the Tuhoe people – there he claimed to have seen divine visions, studied the Bible and claimed to be the Maori brother of Christ. A camp was set up in the isolated dense bush in mid winter. The potato crop failed, at least 50 people, mostly children, died of typhoid and measles. Rua Kenana ordered the clearance of 5 miles of forest 100 years ago in 1908. They opened a bank, people tithed. He built a circular temple called Hiona (Zion) and this also became a Maori parliament. (Modelled on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, which he thought was the Jewish temple). He grew his hair long like a Jewish Nazirite – had 12 wives and 70 children.

By 1908 the tribe was on the brink of civil war – Prime Minister Joseph Ward travelled to the region and met Rua Kenana on Whakatane Beach and he lectured the NZ PM and made his famous statement of sovereignty.

“Rua insisted that his people boycott military service pertaining it was immoral to fight for a Pakeha King and Country given the injustice meted out on Maoris under the British crown. Rua said, I have, *“I have 1400 men here and I am not going to let any of them enlist or go to war. You have no king now. The King of England he is no good. He is beat. The Germans will win. Any money I have I will give to the Germans. The English are no good. They have two laws. One for the Maori and one for the Pakeha. When the Germans win I am going to be king here. I will be king of Maori and of Pakeha.”*

The Government charged him under the Tohunga Suppression Act of 1907 designed to neutralise powerful Maori leaders and Maori dissent.

On 2 April 1916 a 70 strong heavily armed police party arrived in the remote camp with pack horses and wagons and arrested Rua for sedition. He resisted arrest and there was a half hour gun battle. He was, in due course, arrested – taken to Rotorua – hair and beard removed, transferred to Auckland – after a trial lasting 47 days (NZs longest until 1977) found **not** guilty of sedition and sentenced to one year's imprisonment for resisting police.

The Anglican Church Synod in Waiapu in 1907 passed a motion that supported “the recent action of the Government in the direction of the suppression of Tohungism (traditional Maori healing) and trusts that it may be possible for the Church to make more aggressive action among the Maori tribes which are specifically affected by this evil”. (A motion, incidentally, which the Waiapu Synod revoked a few months ago and passed a motion of apology).

Now all that seems, perhaps, a rather lengthy and strange introduction for a sermon on St Luke's Day! Luke – the gentile – the physician – the healer. Dr Luke. Traditionally we think of healing as a personal thing – a healing of our bodies. But healing can also be for nations and societies and groups of people. Today, the Tuhoë people carry a huge burden of grievance about misunderstanding and rejection by both Government and Church. A huge load of resentment and anger at how previous generations were badly treated and indeed attacked by Pakeha. It is a story that could be repeated 1000 times in many variants among indigenous peoples all over the world.

When Rua Kenana met the NZ PM on the beach at Whakatane on 23 March 1908 (my birthday!) an interesting conversation followed:

“Ward addressed both parties publicly asking them to assist to help reconcile the differences in the forthcoming meeting at Ruatoki. To Rua's followers Ward said that he could not accept all that Rua had asked for. In particular, his request for his supporters to be placed on the European electoral role (presumably because they were outnumbered in the Eastern Maori electorate) was unacceptable, for Maoris have ‘*special representation of their own*’. At Rua's request to have a special Maori government, he said, “*I told Rua...that in New Zealand King Edward is king, and is represented here by his government or king... there can't be two suns shining in the sky at the same time.*” Rua replied to Ward, “*Yes, there is only one sun in the heavens, but it shines on one side – the Pakeha side – and it darkens on the other.*”

Rua had become a political embarrassment and there arose the need by the Government to make an example of this man widely seen as an agitator, hoping a crackdown would discourage other Maori activists.”

When I was about 17 I drove with a friend in 1960 in a small pink Fiat Bambina, all the way from Auckland into Lake Waikaremoana on a Venturer Scout expedition to cut tracks around the Lake – we drove down a long windy side road to visit the ruins of Rua Kenana's temple and the village – knowing little or nothing of the story it represented. How differently I would approach it now. As Christians we know, don't we, that love and justice go hand in hand. We know that healing and reconciliation go hand in hand. We know that the Gospel we proclaim is based on the text from your Patron Saint's Gospel of Luke – the text used in that other beach meeting between the first Gospel preacher in Aotearoa NZ, Samuel Marsden and the Nga Puhi Maori chief, Ruatara, in Oihi Bay, in the Bay of Islands on Christmas Day 1814 – Luke 2: 14 ... “suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth, peace, good will among all people’”.

Tonight Heather and Joanne, as you come to be confirmed in this faith, and you, Maggie and Louisa as you come to reaffirm your faith, along with all of us, we face the current realities of our nation and our society which, still today desperately waits to hear the good news of peace and of healing. Our faith and our spirituality are not insulated from the headlines in the news. Rather, our faith equips us to address and deal with the crises, the divisions, the tensions we find in our communities and amongst ourselves – even within the Church. This we talk about as an incarnational theology – a way of living in the world as Jesus did – among us – a way of living out the Gospel of love and justice, of peace and reconciliation and healing, a way of **earthing**, basing our faith in Jesus Christ right in the midst of the mess and horror of the world.

It was the great Church of Scotland minister, Lord George McLeod of Iona who led a team to rebuild the ancient ruins of St Columba's monastery there, who said once:

“I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the centre of the market place as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a Cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on a town garbage heap; at a crossroad so cosmopolitan that they had to write this title in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where he died. And that is what he died about. And that is where the church should be and what the church should be about.”