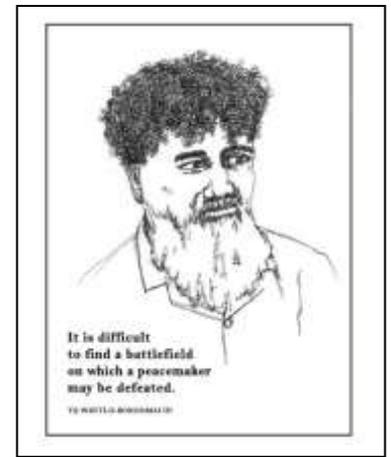


**Parihaka and the message
of non-violence**
5 November 2017
Marion Fairbrass
Micah 6:6-8
Romans 12:12-21
Matthew 5:9, 43-45

http://www.stlukesinthecity.org.nz/sermons_pid_22.html



November 5th is Parihaka Day - commemoration of a brave community which dared to practice non-violent resistance to injustices they were experiencing.

My own awareness of Parihaka began several years ago when I came across a book called something like “Parihaka Woman” – author long forgotten – not Witi Ihimaera’s “The Parihaka Woman”. It was romantic fiction and told the story of a young Maori woman and man who lived at Parihaka and were caught up in the events there. To say I was shocked by what I read and also by the fact that I and anyone I spoke to had never heard about the events, is to put it mildly. I became quite a bore on numerous social occasions as I insisted that people listen to what I had learnt about Parihaka. Many did not believe it was true, and others had many reasons why the actions of the English were acceptable.

Over the years I found out more and experienced a growing desire to visit Parihaka. I didn’t want to just drive there and look at the place. I wanted to engage with those who lived there and earlier this year I finally had the opportunity to do just this.

Most, if not all of you, know the basic outline of the Parihaka story, so I will only give brief outline for the sake of those who may not be familiar with it.

The time is 1860’s. The wars in NZ have just petered out and Maori are returning to their tribal lands – as much as is possible.

Erueti Te Whiti (the charismatic orator) and Tohu Kakohi (the philosopher), two chiefs of Warea, return to their lands. They have come in contact with the bible and become Christians. They are committed to retaining their lands and opposing land acquisition by the crown. They choose to resist non-violently because of what the bible taught.

One of the ongoing injustices is towards Tohu. Because he was the philosopher behind the scenes, he has been largely forgotten in much that has been written.

The crown was confiscating Maori tribal lands because in their minds Maori were British subjects, who had signed a treaty, and rebelled against the government. But the tribes of Taranaki had not signed the Treaty. Therefore, Te Whiti and Tohu believed they were still masters of their ancestral lands, independent of the Crown and could not be said to be citizens who rebelled. They believed Maori and Pakeha could live side by side but felt strongly that the chieftainship of the land should remain with Maori. Europeans could stay and more could come, but there was to be no freehold.

After being forcibly and violently removed from a couple of settlements north/west of the mountain, Te Whiti and Tohu moved their people to Parihaka, deliberately choosing an open, unfortified village where no one bore arms. Maori from all over the country came to join them and the village grew to over 3,000. They had 51 acres under cultivation, many traditional whare, several meeting houses and other buildings – some in the pakeha style which stand to this day.

During the 1870's as colonisers began surveying roads in the area – the surveyors' pegs were removed and returned to them. As fences were pulled down, they were reinstated overnight.

Around 1879 Te Whiti authorised a new level of resistance. Every time Parihaka's crops were trampled by surveyors, villagers would plough a field that settlers had put into pasture. Some accounts say that Te Whiti took this action believing the Governor would come to Parihaka and talk with him, but that did not happen. Instead the arrests escalated.

Te Whiti is reported to have said. *“Go. Put your hand to the plough. Look not back. If any come with guns and swords, be not afraid. If they smite you, smite not in return. If they rend you, be not discouraged. Another will take up the good work.”*¹ We can hear echoes of the gospel message in this.

As more and more men were arrested (about 500 altogether), the government passed several pieces of legislation that meant the men of Parihaka could be held without being charged, without trial, indefinitely.

¹ Scott, Dick, *Ask that Mountain: The Story of Parihaka*, Reed Publishing (NZ) Ltd, 1975, Page 57.

As the local prison filled, the men were taken away to other areas; Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, far from home.

Yet Parihaka continued to resist – peacefully. So finally it was decided to destroy the village once and for all. On 5 November 1881, the troops arrived. They were greeted by children playing and singing, by women giving them bread, by men standing totally unarmed. Nevertheless the village was sacked and all able bodied men arrested. Many women were brutalised, raped, killed.

As most of you know, I am a Franciscan. Two years ago we, as members of the Third Order, Society of St Francis, were challenged to look into our hearts and lives and reflect on the aims of the order – one of which is to spread the spirit of peace and harmony. Were we really living out our calling as Franciscans? Were peace and opposition to injustice in a non-violent manner being shown in our lives? A decision was taken by Chapter that our next National Retreat would take place at Parihaka, on the marae, if it could be arranged. And so, in March this year, we went.

Many of us arrived feeling a sense of guilt. It was our people who had been responsible for the wrongs that happened here. I expected to have to listen in humility as I heard their anger towards me for being Pakeha. But that was not what happened. Our hosts were very firm with us as they assured us that we should not feel guilty. We were not personally responsible for the sins of those who acted against Parihaka.

As each of our hosts shared their personal journey, they acknowledged that at one time in their life they hated Pakeha and could not relate to them. Each then related how they reached a stage of realising the need to forgive so that hatred did not eat away within them – even though they had had no apology and the wrongs had not yet been formally admitted.

I found it saddening that the message from the bible was not part of their decision to forgive, - but I understand it. The people we met do not embrace Christianity, though they are a spiritual people who acknowledge and worship Creator God. There was no real acknowledgement of the influence of Christianity on Te Whiti and Tohu. In their minds it was the Pakeha who were Christians who perpetrated the injustices - so why would they follow Christianity? Yet Te Whiti's bible is kept in a place of honour in the meeting house we slept in and it is sometimes read.

As I reflect on what I have learnt about the history of Parihaka and from these present day people of Parihaka, I face some challenges.

Could I face persecution, injustice and violence with a non-violent stance? Can I forgive before the offender has admitted wrong? What does it mean to live non-violently in NZ in 2017 where I don't face the kind of violence others face? What does Christ call me to?

Father Richard Rohr, a Franciscan Priest from the Center for Action and Contemplation in the United States addressed the issue of non-violence in his Daily Meditations during September this year. He quoted Gandhi as saying: "If one does not practice non-violence in one's personal relations with others and hopes to use it in bigger affairs, one is vastly mistaken."²

So I ask myself the question. How well do I practise non-violence in my personal relations? As I listen to the passage from Romans that we heard today – I ask:

How long do I hold a grudge against others who hurt or annoy me?

Do I secretly gloat when I hear that something has gone wrong for them?

Am I still willing to relate negative stories about them? When someone

offends me, do I nurture anger and hatred towards them – or if not

hatred, at least active dislike? Do I give in easily to the urge to tell others

what has been said or done?

Jesus was very clear as we heard in our readings today. If we are to be his followers, we must love our enemies. In another passage we are commanded to "turn the other cheek" – to take the violence, the wrong, handed out to us without retaliation. Violence, whether it is physical, psychological or emotional, is never OK - nor is revenge. We are called to be peacemakers. So what can we do to enable forgiveness and non-violence to grow within us?

I believe the change can only come through the grace of God. My part in the process is to be open and welcoming towards this change. I can only manage this by becoming more aware that I am in God and God is in me: I am connected. I belong. This requires of me a commitment to prayer and contemplation.

² Rohr, Richard, Center for Action and Contemplation [Meditations@cac.org]

Courageous Nonviolence, Wednesday, September 20, 2017, quoting from [4] Mahatma Gandhi, *Gandhi on Non-Violence*, ed. Thomas Merton (New Directions: 2007), 36-38.

It is a life-long journey – as I begin to accept myself as I am - as a child of God – to embrace all of me – knowing that all of me is created and loved in Christ - I become more able to choose not to project blame on others when I see what I resist recognising in myself in their actions.

As I grow in knowing myself and knowing God, the fear which leads to violence, the insecurity which hinders forgiveness, can begin to diminish. This can only come about as I learn to live in prayer – in communion with God.

I want to end by sharing a vow of non-violence³ used by the Centre for Action and Contemplation a few years ago. It goes like this:

Recognizing the violence in my own heart, yet trusting in the goodness and mercy of God, I vow for one year to practice the nonviolence of Jesus who taught us in the Sermon on the Mount

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons and daughters of God. . . . You have learned how it was said, “You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy”; but I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. In this way, you will be daughters and sons of your Creator in heaven. (Matthew 5:9, 43-45)

Before God the Creator and the Sanctifying Spirit, I vow to carry out in my life the love and example of Jesus

- *by striving for peace within myself and seeking to be a peacemaker in my daily life;*
- *by accepting suffering rather than inflicting it;*
- *by refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence;*
- *by persevering in nonviolence of tongue and heart;*
- *by living conscientiously and simply so that I do not deprive others of the means to live;*
- *by actively resisting evil and working non-violently to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.*

God, I trust in Your sustaining love and believe that just as You gave me the grace and desire to offer this, so You will also bestow abundant grace to fulfil it. [1]

Dare I – dare we – take the call to be peacemakers this seriously?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen

References:

Scott, Dick, *Ask that Mountain: The Story of Parihaka*, Reed Publishing (NZ) Ltd, 1975
Center for Action and Contemplation [Meditations@cac.org] September 17 – 23, 2017.

³ Center for Action and Contemplation [Meditations@cac.org] Sunday, September 17-Friday, September 22, 2017