

Te Pouhere Sunday 2nd June 2018

Celebrating our 3-Tikanga Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia

Readings:

Isaiah 42:10-20

2 Cor.5:14-19

John 15:9-17

Reflection

Good morning, talofa lava, malo a lele, taloha ni, nisa bula, tena koutou katoa – today I greet you in some of the languages of our local Anglican communion – English, Polynesian and Maori. Today we celebrate Te Pouhere Sunday and the diversity of our three-Tikanga church in the province of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia.

Since 1992 our constitution, that is, Te Pouhere, has enabled each tikanga (or cultural stream) to order its affairs according to its own cultural context – an enabling which recognises the beauty and diversity of God’s creation, and the beauty and diversity of humanity within that creation. (And each one of us is free to choose which cultural stream we identify with.) We are fortunate in having not one, but three archbishops: recently-ordained Don Tamihere, retiring archbishop Winston Halapua and our Pakeha archbishop Philip Richardson – a trinity of shepherds to lead and guide us as a province, as well as our local (and in Christchurch – anticipated) diocesan bishops.

It is particularly appropriate that Te Pouhere Sunday follows the celebrations of Pentecost and Trinity Sundays – **Pentecost Sunday**, when we recall the birth of the church - a diverse group of people and cultures with different languages, called together through the power of the Holy Spirit, an ingathering of people from all over: *“from every nation under heaven”—thousands of them. And surely including rich and poor, old and young, well and unwell, beautiful and plain, intelligent and less so, educated and illiterate. The rabble and the elite, the latte drinkers and the beer guzzlers* (as one commentator describes); and then **Trinity Sunday**, when we celebrate the three-fold nature of our Trinitarian God-in-community – Creator, Redeemer and Life-giver. In the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the love of Christ, the Spirit of God is passed from one human heart to another.

Our scriptures call us to live out the challenge of community, on a foundation of LOVE – because yes, it is challenging to live with diversity, embracing the love which Christ embodied for us. Diversity can be unsettling. It can be uncomfortable. It can cause friction. Differences can cause things to go up in flames in the church or any other body. Or, like the Pentecostal fire, it can be a transformational energy. Diversity is probably the single most potent source of transformational energy available to us. How to manage, how to temper the Pentecostal fires of diversity has been a challenge to the Church for over 2000 years. From Arian controversy, Orthodox, Roman, Celtic and English tradition clashes, Reformation history, to issues such as slavery, emancipation, prohibition, contraception abortion and the ordination of women (all influenced by interpretation of scripture) – the fires of diversity have and continue to challenge the Church!

We are acutely aware of this at present, following our recent General Synod/Te Hinota Whanui in New Plymouth, where Motion 29 regarding same gender blessings was debated, reshaped and endorsed as Motion 7, while causing lament and struggle for some. In our own diocese we continue to live with the potentially divisive repercussions of this. By contrast, one whole cultural stream – Tikanga Pasefika - while standing firm in their scriptural and cultural understandings, have chosen the way of love: unity and belonging to the greater whole of the Province and Church, rather than disharmony and separation. The Scriptures reinforce for us that love is the source and the goal of all things. It is the primary commandment given to Israel and it is the primary command given by Jesus to his disciples. Jesus taught that God's kingdom is to be worked out in the love which we show for one another. God loves *all* people, and we are to reflect the love of God and our love for God by likewise loving others.

But we know that this is not always easy either in social life, or family life, or in church life. We can struggle to work this out effectively in our relationships with one another, the diverse people that we are in all sorts of ways.

The Corinthian Church is so instructive for us in this way. Paul, in his letter to the early church in Corinth – a church struggling to come to terms with difference, and what it means to live in diverse community - reminds them that in Christ, they are a new creation – that they, both Jew and Gentile are called to a ministry of reconciliation.

The Christian community in Corinth gathered people from across class structures, cultures, religious backgrounds, socioeconomic differences. It was the kind of community which could bear witness to Paul's great declaration to the Galatians about there being neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free, for all are one in Christ. Except that at Corinth it *was* horribly divided.

We have read today from the second letter. The first addresses some of those differences very directly. This second one has come about a year on, but it is clear that little has changed. Paul reminds them of the mission to which they are called. God in Christ has reconciled us to himself and has entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation. Those who are reconciled to God, demonstrate that through reconciled human relationships.

Paul writes that Christ died for all so that those who live should cease to live for themselves and should live instead for Christ. And for whom did Christ live? He lived for others. As the church we are constantly seeking to model how that is so in our relationships with one another. We seek to express it in the life we share as local communities of faith. Te Pouhere seeks to express it structurally for the life of our church as a whole. In doing so we can model the hope of reconciliation to a nation too often beset by the tensions of bi-cultural and multi-cultural living.

The interweaving of a diverse group into selfless, caring community, brings new life.

And Jesus, in our gospel reading from John, commands his disciples (and that means us!), to love one another as he loves us – to abide in his love and to bear the fruit of that love, as we live it out in deep relationship with God and one another. This is all about relationship – a relationship of abiding, fruit-bearing friendship – in Christ, and with each other. Jesus tells us that lasting, fruit-bearing, sacrificial love fills us with His joy – a joy made

complete in us. This is no wishy-washy love, but love that sometimes hurts, sometimes involves sacrifice, sometimes means adjustments and new directions, and yet, fills us with Christ's inner joy.

“Love is not just a gift. It is also a pattern, to be worked out in the humblest and plainest situations.” writes New Testament lecturer John Proctor. This everyday love pattern for everyday life - gifted to us from God, commanded of us by Jesus, and inspired by God's Spirit – is a simple interwoven pattern, yet often involving sacrifice.

Diversity *can* be combustible. Differences *can* be incendiary. But seeing and embracing our essential equality, our radical equality before God can be a way of channeling, of tempering the fiery energies of diversity. What could be a wildfire out of control becomes a dynamo for our transformation and growth when we acknowledge our essential equality. (A dynamo for transformation and growth.)

Pray then that together we may be effective agents of the gospel of love, and that in all of our relationships within the church and beyond it we may be ministers of the reconciliation that we have found in Christ. Amen.