

Te Pouhere Sunday 23rd June 2019 St. Luke's

Readings: Isaiah 42:10-20; Acts 10:34-43; Matt.7:24-29

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.

The words 'Te Pou Here' refer to the mooring post and come from “te pou here takata, te pou here tikaka” – the post that ties the people and the customs together.

Since 1992 our Province's constitution - Te Pouhere - has enabled each tikanga (or cultural stream) to order its affairs according to its own cultural context and customs – an enabling which recognises the beauty and diversity of God's creation, and the beauty and diversity of humanity within that creation. This offers the opportunity for self-determination, self-propagation and self-support (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: the Most Reverends Don Tamihere, Feremu Cama and Philip Richardson – a trinity of shepherds to lead and guide us as a province, as well as our local 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'. And then Trinity Sunday, when we celebrate the three-fold nature of our Trinitarian God-in-community.

Our scriptures call us to live out the challenge of community on a foundation of LOVE – yet, 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.

How to manage, how to temper the Pentecostal fires of diversity has been a challenge to the Church for over 2000 years. But diversity is probably the single most potent source of transformational energy available to us.

I feel deeply privileged to participate in our Province's Anglican Women's Studies Centre – an opportunity to work across our diverse three Tikanga Church, celebrating each unique cultural stream and building loving relationships with the contributing pasesika, Maori and pakeha Anglican women. We are both challenged – and deeply enriched - by our engagement with one another.

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.

As the apostle Peter learned from his vision at Joppa, and shared with the gentile Cornelius, his family and friends at Caesarea: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality.” What must have been a shocking revelation to the devoutly Jewish Peter – that nothing God has made is profane or unclean – enables him to accept difference and form new Christian community, baptizing the Caesarean gentiles and staying with them for several days. And not only that – when Peter returned to Jerusalem, he was able to share this news with the believing community there, who after initial criticism and challenge, listened intently to Peter's story, reflected silently and then praised God. What a momentous shift – an overturning of attitudes and understandings embodied by this embryonic church community.

Similarly, the words we hear today at the end of Matthew 7, invite a shift in attitude: build your lives on a firm foundation – a foundation of love, a foundation of love in community. In the seventh chapter of Matthew we are commanded not to judge others, to attend to the logs in our own eyes before the specks in our neighbours; to trust in the loving goodness of God; to make life-giving choices; to build relationship with God; and the Golden Rule of relationship and community – “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you” This is the firm foundation Jesus calls us to establish. A foundation of Christian love.

Cynthia Bourgeault, an Episcopal priest, calls Jesus’ teaching and way of life “the path of conscious love.” She writes:

“Conscious love” . . . emphasizes the life-affirming and implicitly relational nature of the path, and the word “conscious” makes clear that the touchstone here is transformation, not simply romance. Conscious love is “love in the service of inner transformation”—or if you prefer, “inner transformation in the service of love.” Either way, this is exactly what Jesus was about.ⁱ

When we’re conscious, we will always do the loving thing, the connecting thing, the intimate thing, the communion thing, the aware thing. To do the unloving thing is always to somehow be unconscious at that moment.

The Buddhist psychologist John Welwood (1943–2019) wrote:

Instead of looking to a relationship for shelter, we could welcome its power to wake us up in areas of life where we are asleep and where we avoid naked, direct contact with life. This approach puts us on a path. It commits us to movement and change, providing forward direction by showing us exactly where we most need to grow. Embracing relationship as a path also gives us a practice: learning to use each difficulty along the way as an opportunity to go further, to connect more deeply, not just with others, but with our own aliveness as well.

By contrast, dreaming that love will save us, solve all our problems or provide a steady state of bliss or security only keeps us stuck in wishful fantasy, undermining the real power of love—which is to transform us. For our relationships to flourish, we need to see them in a new way—as a series of opportunities for developing greater awareness, discovering deeper truth, and becoming more fully human.ⁱⁱ

“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.

So 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.

May we be effective agents of the gospel of love and in all our relationships -within the church and beyond - may we be ministers of the reconciliation that we have found in Christ. May we be a mooring post – te pou here – where safety and sanctuary allows for growth and transformation.

And a Te Pouhere prayer:

Creator God, you make the sun to give light in the day, the moon and the stars for guidance at night, you divided the seas making a path through the waters. Grant that, sailing out in our canoes of Tikanga Pakeha, Tikanga Maori, and Tikanga Polynesia, we may follow the way you have charted for us and from our separate home ports find our common destination in you. We ask this through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Helen Roud

ⁱ Bourgeault, Cynthia. *Love in Service of Transformation*, Monday, June 17, 2019, <https://cac.org/author/cynthia-bourgeault/>

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*