

Te Pouhere Sunday 2011 – difference and togetherness

Revelation 7:9-10, 21:22-26; 2 Corinthians 5:14- 20; Matthew 13:47-52

Today is *Te Pouhere* Sunday – a fitting Sunday perhaps, in the aftermath of the Te Tai Tokerau by-election, for us as Anglican Christians to reflect upon, pray for and celebrate the unique re-ordering of our church into these cultural strands or ways of doing things – Tikanga Maori, Pasifika and Pakeha. This re-ordering took place in 1992 as a response to Anglican Maori desire to express their faith in their own way; at that time Pasifika Anglicans also felt the need for space to be themselves and Anglican Pakeha recognised the need to move beyond the culture of the settler church.

Accordingly, the church's constitution says that, among other things, it is required to “maintain the right of every person to choose any particular cultural expression of the faith”.¹ The word “constitution” in *te reo* is *pouhere*. The imagery is rich: *Te Pouhere* is the hitching post for *waka*. The idea here is that there is one post where three large canoes, and several in turn tied to them, find a safe birth.

Our *pouhere*, of course, is the cross of Christ. It is to this blood stained *pou* to which we followers of Jesus are all tied, regardless of the *waka* in which sit. There is one cross which is effective for us all, one community of the reconciled into which we are all baptised, one ministry of reconciliation in a broken world, to which we are called. As Saint Paul later put it in his letter to the Galatians:

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are

¹ Preamble 12:C

one in Christ Jesus.² ... For now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For *he* is our peace; in *his* flesh *he* has made *both groups* into *one* and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create *in himself* one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.³

In this regard, the radical “egalitarianism” of the first Christians that we read of in the early chapters of the book of Acts, readily comes to mind.⁴ Here we see how the first believers, both Jew and Gentile, hitherto sworn enemies with no respect for each other, lived in unity, resolving their differences as they came to light, with the same love, the same self emptying with which they were loved first by the one who, “not counting equality with God as something to be exploited, emptied himself”⁵ and became one of us.

Yet in our first reading today from Saint John’s Revelation, there is a very strong assertion that egalitarianism and “sameness” are not the same thing. When we assemble in the bonds of peace before the throne of God

² Galatians 3:28.

³ Galatians 2:15-18.

⁴ Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37; 6:1-7.

⁵ Philippians 2:6b-7a.

we do so as “from all the tribes and peoples and languages”⁶ of God’s creation. Yes, our oneness in the Spirit of Jesus Christ springs (as Paul makes clear to both the Galatians and Corinthians), from our common baptism into Christ’s body. But *difference* is maintained in this unity as something, in this reconciled relationship, to be celebrated: Men and women remain men and women, Greeks remain Greeks and Jews remain Jews; the nations of the earth remain nations even as they assemble in worship and adoration before the lamb that was slain, rose from the dead and rules as King of *all* the tribes of the earth.

And at the end of all things, John’s vision is of each one bringing their different *taonga* through the heavenly gates which will never shut since it will always be light in God’s presence.

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In your pew sheet you can find the story of Henare Taratoa who is remembered for the compassion he advocated towards his enemies – the colonial forces – who attacked Gate Pa. Taratoa’s attempt to spell out, and live out, principles of reconciliation, justice, love and mercy in midst of life’s ambiguities, well preceded the Geneva Conventions of 1949.⁷

Taratoa was a devout follower of Jesus who worked energetically for his people that they may know Christ. Yet he also did more than pray and preach, or do good works or even politic for his cause (all of which he did do). He took sides in a conflict that required each one to decide where they stood. He stood his ground and paid for it – no doubt having taken the lives of brothers in Christ on the other side who also did what they

⁶ Revelation 7:9.

⁷ The Geneva Conventions specifically protect people who are not taking part in the hostilities (civilians, health workers and aid workers) and those who are no longer participating in the hostilities, such as wounded, sick and shipwrecked soldiers and prisoners of war. See: <http://www.icrc.org/eng/war-and-law/treaties-customary-law/geneva-conventions/index.jsp>

thought was justified and right. His was a gutsy faith that engaged with a messy world.

When I re-read of Taratoa this week, I couldn't help but wonder what sort of encounter he would have had with Jesus or Saint Paul had either of them been hanging out in the Waikato at that time – no doubt a spirited one. In any case, he is our brother – regardless of what waka he paddled. We are tied to him in Christ.

This is more than a sentimental attachment. Rather it is one that pulls us together into bearing witness to the message of reconciliation we see in Jesus Christ. We are the body of Christ, and by one Spirit we are baptised into one body. In the bitterly divided world in which we live, a world shouts at us day and night to take notice and take sides, we are called to work out what this means. As both Taratoa and Jesus bear witness. This is no easy thing. But it is, never-the-less, the life we are called to, both in our difference and togetherness.