

“Where mountains rise”, a sermon based on Luke 9:28-43 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on 7 February, 2016, the day after Waitangi Day.

Many memories remain from the breaking of dawn on the 1st of January in the year 2000.

Television showed pictures from around the nation and then across the globe as each part was first touched by the rays of the sun.

One of those memories is of people gathering on Mount Hikurangi on the East Coast of Aotearoa.

Mount Hikurangi is recognised as the first point on the New Zealand mainland to greet the morning sun.

So it was filmed as the first mainland site in the world to greet the sun at the dawn of the new millennium.

Yes there are Pacific islands to the East but the tilt of the earth means the sun strikes Mt Hikurangi first.

And yes, the Chathams are to the East, hence the reference to the first mainland site.

Even south islanders acknowledge Mt Hikurangi.

When Kai Tahu, the south island iwi or people, greet north island visitors they say, "Haere mai, e te Rāwhiti!" (Welcome, O Sunrise!).

The mountain is sacred to the local Ngati Porou people.

Legend has it that when Maui fished up the North Island, Mount Hikurangi was the first point to emerge from the sea.

It's also said to be the place where Maui's waka got stranded after his famous fishing trip.

A sacred mountain, especially for Ngati Porou.

Mt Hikurangi.

Many believe the sacred mountain for Presbyterians is Maungapohatu, in the Ureweras, the sacred mountain of Tuhoe, the people of the mist, of the eastern bay of plenty.

The Maori prophet Rua Kenana established a community at Maungapohatu in the early 1900s.

Rua was badly mistreated by the Crown. Pain remains, brought to the surface again by the Police raid in Ruatoki in 2007.

In 1918, John Laughton, a Presbyterian minister, established a school at Maungapohatu.

It is believed Rua said to Laughton, I will look after the adults. You look after the children.

So, through Rua and Laughton, a relationship developed between Presbyterians and Tuhoe and between Presbyterians and the faith of Rua, Ringatu, that continues to this day.

The Presbyterian Church's main marae is at Ohope near Whakatane in the eastern bay of plenty. All through Tuhoe territory, up the Waimana valley and through the Ureweras, there are Presbyterian churches.

So it is that many regard Maungapohatu, the sacred mountain of Tuhoe, as a mountain sacred to Presbyterians.

These mountains, Hikurangi and Maungapohatu, are much more than geological sites, more than mountains to climb or features to photograph.

They embody the people. They represent the people.

I know it for myself.

My family come from the Waikato. My people are Waikato.

When I do a formal greeting in Maori, a pepeha, I say, *toku maunga ko Taupiri*. My mountain is Taupiri, the sacred mountain beside the Waikato river, the mountain on which are buried Maori kings and the Maori queen.

When the Maori Queen died 10 years ago, television showed her funeral at her marae Turangawaewae, then her body being carried by waka, down the Waikato river, to the foot of Taupiri.

Then carried up the steep mountain, the bearers helped by people pulling on long ropes, for the Queen to be buried near the peak of Taupiri.

In naming the mountain, I join with all the people who have been Waikato down through the ages and the people who are now Waikato.

Taupiri is our mountain, my mountain. Taupiri is who we are. This is my identity, whatever else I am.

Taupiri joins me to the story of our people. The story does not begin with me – I only continue it.

Supremely, the mountain anchors me to this whenua, this land, Aotearoa. When I name it, I am naming my anchor.

Taupiri invites me to learn the story, to live the story, to embody and represent the story, as one anchored here.

So it is for Sinai where Moses meets God. Sinai is the place where God's presence abides, a presence the people experience as devouring fire.

On Sinai people experience the otherness of God, the freedom of God, the God who is more than all there is, more than they are, more than the total of their wisdom.

The people are awed and humbled by such otherness, sensing perhaps how restricted is their vision, their perspective.

Out of this freedom, Moses receives the covenant, the agreement that binds the people to God and God to the people.

The covenant anchors them in God.

As Hikurangi, Maungapohatu, Taupiri does for people in this land, so Sinai anchors the people in God, in the life of God, in the story of God, as the people of God.

Toku maunga ko Hinai. Our mountain is Sinai.

From such encounter, Moses comes down - his face shining because he had been with God.

So it is for Elijah who encounters God on Mt Horeb, replaying what happened to Moses on Sinai.

Elijah on the mountain hears the sounds of wind, earthquake and fire, and then the sound of sheer silence.

It is the silence that awes him, humbles him, woos him out of his cave, off the mountain to fulfil his calling.

A depressed man has his commission renewed not in noise, but silence; not in bombast but in quietness.

And now Moses and Elijah are with Jesus on the mountain.

God gave Moses the law on the mountain, in tablet.

God renews Elijah's call on the mountain, in silence.

Moses the lawgiver; Elijah the prophet; and Jesus to whom the law and the prophets point – anchored in God.

Moses and Elijah and Jesus are talking about his exodus, his departure, his leaving.

His crucifixion is already in mind.

So Peter wants to secure the presence by providing a house for each one, three houses to preserve their life with us.

But God cannot be anchored in a house, a dwelling, a building, however nicely built.

God comes in a cloud, an overshadowing cloud, a mist, an enveloping mist, a swirling, permeable, non-grabbable, elusive mist, they could see and feel, but not package or pin down or put in a container.

And from the mist, the voice: listen to him – listen to Jesus.

Our anchor is in the mist, the cloud, the presence, the voice.

So here we are, in the everyday.

Our only anchor is God's capacity to break through to us, to captivate us, to woo and persuade us, day by day by day.

Spirit.

Our only anchor is God's Spirit winning and guiding us, day by day.

The missionaries referred to the Treaty of Waitangi as a covenant between the crown and the Maori chiefs.

For these chiefs the Treaty of Waitangi was a covenant between the Māori people and the Queen as head of the English Church and State.

The Māori name for the Treaty is 'Te Kawenata o Waitangi ('the Covenant of Waitangi').

At the time many Māori believed the Treaty enabled Pakeha and Māori to be one people in spirit and society.

Governor Hobson said to each chief after they signed the treaty "He iwi tahi tatou"- now we are all one people.

One people because we were part of the covenant of Waitangi, Maori as tangata whenua, people of the land, and Pakeha as tangata tiriti, people of the covenant, the treaty.

The Waitangi covenant anchors us here, enables us to live here.

It's for living out, for expressing.

In that sense it is as elusive as the mist, for it is only in living as partners, in honouring mountains, in living our identity as people of the covenant, that we are anchored.

So it is with God.

We cannot preserve God's presence.

We can only live from the covenant of God's love for humankind.

We can only thrive in the mist, hear the silence, know the presence, anchored in God, embodying who we are in God, people of the covenant, people of both covenants, day by day by day.

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