

**“The Call”, a sermon based on Mark 1:14-20 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church, Dunedin, New Zealand on Sunday 21 January 2018.**

Last Friday I attended the tangi, the funeral, of Millie Amiria Te Kaawa, mother of the Reverend Wayne Te Kaawa, one of our ministers, who has spoken here at Knox over the last year and helped us in many ways.

The tangi was on the marae at Onepu near Whakatane. Millie had been Clerk then Moderator of Te Aka Puaho, the Maori synod of the Presbyterian Church, one of the leaders of our church. We had worked closely together.

Before the service, people gathered outside the gate of the marae, until perhaps a hundred were waiting. No one could enter the marae until we were called, until we heard the karanga. The call is the initial step in entering a marae, always given by a woman.

Millie was a kaikaranga, a woman trained and appointed to give the call. The visitors also have a woman who responds to the call, so this call and response occurs as the manuhiri, the visitors, walk solemnly on to the marae.

Millie said each part of the kaikaranga needs to be said in one breath. Then the response in one breath. The call and response continue, sometimes blending, sometimes distinct, as we move together. Even when we are seated, for the next stage of the powhiri, the welcome, even then the call is not over. The speech of visitors often begins like this ...

Ka tangi te titi, ka tangi te kaka, ka tangi hoki ko au. As the muttonbird calls, as the parrot calls, so may I call.

Why the titi and the kaka? Because the song of the titi is clear and the song of the kaka is continuous.

Mark describes the call and response of the first followers of Jesus. Both uttered in one breath, as Mark puts it, immediately. This is the call that enables us to move, to move together. The call begins and maintains our life with Jesus.

Those first responders heard it in a familiar place, at work, among family, among colleagues. How does the call prick up our ears? How does the call awaken a second thought from us?

Amid the familiar and known and reliable and unchanging and predictable, how do we hear a different voice?

Amid the commitments we have made, the patterns that help us get through, the ways developed to keep going, how do we hear a disruptive call?

People hear the call in different ways.

A woman had been trained as a teacher and did it well. She loved the children and their responsiveness. She had developed patterns to make it a bit easier, enough routine to enable her to keep fresh. And then ... she was asked to help at a school that was struggling. Did she really want to start again, in a different environment, perhaps less supportive, less rewarding, much less certain?

And another call ...

A woman had built up a successful accounting firm, long hours, hard work, attracting clients, over many years, until it was finally going well, and she saw that an NGO needed financial advice but could not pay much. And she wondered if her firm could do the work. It meant less income, greater risk, frustrating meetings, unpaid hours. Was it really worth it?

And another ...

A man was used to facts and figures and was no left winger. But that morning he read the article in the ODT about the impact of climate change on Central Otago, and it shocked him to realise how little was being done to reduce emissions. So he undertook a stock-take of his carbon footprint – the car he drove, the packaging of goods they bought, and more. They joined a collective and a group agitating for reduced emissions.

The call is very near to us, at hand, every day, as clear as the titi and as insistent as the kaka.

The call sometimes to stay where we are and work with new imagination, sometimes to leave and start over.

The call is ongoing, not once in a life-time.

And although it is personal, it always invites us to move with others, as on the marae, listening and responding to the call of Jesus. The word repent is often associated with sin and judgement.

I like the suggestion that it means to imagine a different world, the realm of God, of justice and love, and to live into that world. How does that happen?

I have been struggling to learn te reo. Our teacher took us outside the class room, and said look at what is happening around you. But don't use English to describe what you see, start using the Maori language. You won't get every word, nor every verb, nor every tense or order right, but when you see a car travelling, start thinking kei te haere te motoka. Use what you know and wonder about the order, and practise your way into it. Put words on the things around home – cupboards, doors, windows, fruit bowls.

In the realm of God ...

No longer just a person – the image of God.

No longer just an economy – the sharing of God's goods.

No longer just nature – the creation of God.

No longer just shared understanding – the work of God's Spirit.

No longer just children – reminders of the realm of God.

No longer just people who are poor – people for whom God has a special love.

No longer a marginal place Galilee, nor a marginal occupation – fishing; now the place in which Jesus called, and an occupation to which he came.

The call came to the fishermen on the seashore, where they were at home.

At a time when church is foreign and strange to a majority of New Zealanders, when people are unlikely to be part of a conventional church as an initial step, the first call is still to people where they are, perhaps in their workplace.

As one writer puts it – this is not a time when people come to church as the first step, but when the church goes to people as the first step. The call was to follow, to trust this Jesus. The time is fulfilled, the realm of God has come near, repent, believe in the good news.

Paul invites the Corinthians to be free to respond.

It is as if you were not married.

It is as if you no longer mourned.

It is as if you no longer rejoiced.

It is as if you had no possessions.

It is as if your dealings did not matter.

Although it often feels more complex than that. God to Jonah invites fresh imagination. Jonah believed the Ninevites were irredeemable because that was how God saw them. Then God changed God's mind. And Jonah had to change his.

That is why we listen every day, not just once, not just then.

Ka tangi te titi.

Ka tangi te kaka.

The realm of God in Jesus is near at hand.

Calling to us.

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