

“Commemorating Waitangi”, a sermon preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Sunday 4 February 2018, two days before Waitangi Day. The readings were Ephesians 2:11-22, Mark 6:30-44.

When the minister of Treaty Settlements wanted guidance about how to make an offer of settlement to the Tuhoe iwi, he went to a Presbyterian elder.

The elder was Sir Rodney Gallen and this happened just before Sir Rodney died in 2012.

The minister said that when he came to make the offer he carefully followed Sir Rodney’s instructions.

When the Maori Council initiated an annual Waitangi lecture, the person they asked to give the first lecture was Rodney Gallen.

This morning I want to take up some of Sir Rodney’s ideas.

Pakeha are still learning how to live as people of the Treaty, tangata tiriti, and this Pakeha Christian offers us insights of how to do so today.

First, a little about him.

Sir Rodney Gallen was born on the East Coast of the North Island and became fluent in the Maori language and active in Maori organisations. As a young lawyer he acted for Tuhoe in their claim for Lake Waikaremoana. He was given the ancestral name of Te Turi o Kahu in appreciation of his successful representation.

His father had seen Police unjustly arresting the Maori prophet Rua Kenana and the memory of that had stayed with his father throughout his life. Rodney Gallen became a Queens Counsel and then in 1983 a High Court Judge. Just prior to that, he chaired the Commission regarding the Abbotsford landslip here in Dunedin.

When he died the Law Society (not a church body), included this in its published statement:

“During his lifetime Sir Rodney was a committed Christian. He had a long involvement in the affairs of the Presbyterian Church and was prominent in the Church’s General Assembly joint committee with the Māori synod, Te Aka Puaho.”

The Law Society quoted from a paper he wrote for the Church:

“... We all live in this country and for most of us we have no other, not any relationship with any other. Our relationship with the land is one which binds us all together, although we need to bear in mind that not all people who live here relate in the same way to the land as such. Nevertheless because for most if not all of us the land gives us our first identity we start from a unifying factor and can reasonably build on that. There is no doubt Māori have a special attachment to the land and to particular places, for many reasons, but it is also true that Pakeha hold such attachments as well.”

I read part of what Sir Rodney said on Waitangi Day:

“Maori named the land. In doing so they built a memory into the land itself of the encounters which gave rise to those names. They roamed over and knew the mountains and rivers, the Lakes and the sea. They knew where presences dwelt and they named them.

They identified places which imposed a behaviour on those who approached them. All these things were a part of their life and handed on from generation to generation. The encounter with the land was constant and it shaped the people.

As the generations passed the stories and traditions grew. People remembered and sang of the lives of their forbears, of the triumphs and tragedies, and of the human relationships which occurred on the land and in relation to it

In 1897 Elsdon Best published an account of a journey through the Urewera to Waikaremoana. In that account he spoke of standing on the Huiarau range and looking over Waikaremoana while his guide Tutakangahau of Tamakaimoana sang a lament for the past. Best's translation was as follows:-

“Hail ye lands of the rippling waters, hail the lands of the ancestors of Tuhoe and Nga Potiki. Hail children of the mountain whose bones lie beneath the dark waters in the burial caves of old on many a hard fought parekura. It is you O ancient Hatiti, who fell at Te Maire there below in lonely Whanganui. And you O Toko of the strong arm who died as man should die in battle with upraised weapon. O helpless women and little children whose bodies choked the cave of Tikitiki whose blood reddened the waters of Wai kotero your bones have long since been dust but the hearts of Tuhoe still remember you. Rest you in peace in your chamber of death beneath the silent waters

of Waikare for the forest holds the crumbling walls of Nga Whakarara and from Te Ana o Tawa which darkens yon cliff at Te Ahi Titi I yet hear across the waters the wail of Ruapani as we drove them through the gates of death as utu for your lives. Greetings to you O children of the mist for your kainga are silent and deserted and your lands trodden by a strange race. No smoke rises round the silent sea even from Te Mara o te Atua to te Korokoro o Tawhaki and I alone of your generation am left. I alone remain of the fighting men of old. Remain in peace O children for the strength I held to avenge you in days gone by has now passed away and the thought grows that this is the last time I shall climb this great ika whenua to greet you. E Noho ra.”

The land, the people and the happenings of the past are inseparably intertwined. We love this land Maori and Pakeha alike but we love it more when we are aware of its past and the associations which cluster about every inch of it. A whole dimension is added to our feeling for our homeland when we are aware of its past.”

The writer of Ephesians says the life of Christ among us is to break down “the dividing wall between us.”

In attending to the law, the commandments and the ordinances, Christ created a new humanity, making peace, reconciling groups, putting to death hostility.

May the life of Christ flourish among us and spread through this land!

We are citizens together and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

We are people of God’s covenant and the Waitangi covenant.

That land beneath us witnesses to those covenants, as the rainbow arches over all.

The land beneath us speaks of the apostles and prophets who have come before us, apostles and prophets in our faith and apostles and prophets in our cultures.

The land beneath us bears the footprints of Maori and Pakeha over centuries, and we more fully live here by tracing those footprints, looking for their stories to fill out the limits of our own.

How good it is increasingly to find markers on our streets of people who lived here before us.

When we disregard the Treaty, we divide over land as we know, from Waitara and Rangiriri and Gate Pa.

When we honour the Treaty, we repeat the actions of the Maori chief, Te Whiti o Rongomai, who following the way of Jesus pulled up the pegs of division.

We are invited to receive the spirit of Christ, who breaks down dividing walls, and who on a hill long ago showed us how to share the gifts of God so everyone flourishes, 5000 and more.

May Waitangi Day be an annual opportunity for Maori and Pakeha alike, to love this land more by becoming more aware of its past and the associations which cluster about every inch of it.

KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

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