

**Nga Kai-Rui I Te Rongopai – “the Seed-sowers of the Gospel”**, a sermon based on Luke 4:21-30 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on 3 February 2019, the Sunday before Waitangi Day.

The first sentence of the gospel reading we heard was the last sentence of the gospel reading last Sunday.

At that time I spoke about - the immediacy of God’s Word and the urgency of God’s future brought home to us by the Holy Spirit.

Summarised in the word that begins the gospel reading we heard.

That word so confronting on the lips of Jesus that it enraged people, they manhandled him to the brow of the hill, to hurl him off the cliff.

The word – Today - today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

Here is hometown Jesus telling hometown truth to hometown people.

And they knew it was about them, which is what enraged them.

Preachers can speak in generalities and principles so we don’t think what is said is about us. It is about someone else, the other people, so no one is offended.

These people know it is about them, here, now, today.

Waitangi Day is about us, here, now, today.

Among other things, Waitangi Day marks the gospel coming home to us, to our town and place, here now.

Before the missionaries came, in the culture of Maori, there was receptive soil. God was already here so many Maori tribes and leaders welcomed the gospel, to hear it, to live it and to share it. And through them many of our predecessors, Maori and Pakeha, received the gospel. Those Maori evangelists were crucial to the spread of faith in Aotearoa.

I want to tell you about one.

This will be known to those who were at the Columba College Service last Wednesday, because I told the story then.

She was ten years old. And she was instrumental in the ending of warfare in Te Wai Pounamu, the South Island.

Her name was Tarore and she lived in a small Waikato village, now called Waharoa just north of Matamata about half way between Hamilton and Tauranga. Near Hobbiton.

It was 1835.

Her father was the mighty chief Ngakuku of the Waikato.

When the missionaries Alfred and Charlotte Brown moved into the area at Maori invitation, Ngakuku was the first to show genuine interest.

At the same time Ngakuku was learning about the Christian faith, so was his beloved daughter Tarore.

She was a bright student who quickly learned to read. She memorised parables such as the good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son and she recited them to large crowds who gathered to hear her.

The following year, 1836 there were inter-tribal conflicts near her village and so it was decided to shift the school and the school children toward Tauranga.

And there, tragedy struck.

They camped one night at a famous waterfall and early in the morning the camp was attacked by an enemy tribe.

Miraculously, all the children escaped. Except for Tahore who was murdered – she was twelve years old.

She was buried at the Matamata pa on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 1836. And her gravesite remains there today.

People visit it to pay respect because of what I am about to tell you.

Her father was naturally grief stricken ... distraught.

After her funeral he made a deeply moving speech that included these words

“Let this be the finishing of the war with Rotorua. Now let peace be made.”

He said those words in the context of utu, the right to revenge a wrong.

So it was that although normally there would have been a revenge, a life would be taken because Tarore had been murdered. Instead there was peace.

When Tarore was killed she had a small kete, a small kit, around her neck. Her attacker thought it would contain something precious so he tore it away from her. But when he got it home, there was only a book. And so it lay neglected.

But a slave, Ripihau, had learned to read, so the attacker Te Uita asked him to read the book. The attacker was so convicted by what he read in the gospel of Luke, that he became a Christian and he decided to make amends with Tarore's father and Tarore's tribe. And so it was that he travelled to Matamata, he sought and was granted forgiveness and then he worshipped with the local people.

Meanwhile, Tarore's copy of Luke's gospel continued its transforming work. Ripahau, the slave, was released from slavery and he travelled home to Otaki, to his people north of Wellington. He used pages from Tarore's book to teach people to read and write.

One of his students was Katu Te Rauparaha, the son of the fierce-some chief Te Rauparaha who had come south and fought many battles in this part of the country. Katu was baptised, taking the name Tamihana. He in turn became a teacher. And years later, he decided to travel south to where his father had fought many wars and caused much violence.

He brought a message of peace and a promise to the end of warfare. The personal example of this son of the renowned fighter and the compelling nature of the gospel of Luke led people to lay down their arms and to end warfare.

And so it was that warfare ended in Te Wai Pounamu.

Central was Tarore, who at the age of 10 started speaking of forgiveness and peace.

Let's pause for a moment, to honour Tarore and Ngakuku and Te Uita and Ripihau and Katu Te Rauparaha and Alfred and Charlotte Brown, those early evangelists.

And let's reflect on the story alongside the gospel.

Jesus tells of how God sent the prophet Elijah not to the group of acceptable widows, but to the outsider, the widow at Zarephath in Sidon.

Sidon is the kind of foreign power insiders like to despise.

And God sent Elisha the prophet, not to the inside group, but to Naaman the Syrian not only a foreigner but the commander of an enemy army.

The hometown people were enraged by the suggestion that God worked with people they reviled.

Now I imagine that attitude had to be addressed at each stage of the story of Tarore.

I imagine people said, Tarore's kete is important to us, it reminds us of our precious Tarore. We demand it back. It is ours. And the gospel of Luke would have gone nowhere.

I imagine there were people around Ngakuku who reminded him of how he had been treated by the people from Rotorua, murdering his beloved daughter. They must not get away with it. We must teach them a lesson.

I imagine Ripihau could have been so bitter at his enslavement, that he had refused to read the gospel that day.

I imagine Katu te Rauparaha could want to uphold the reputation of his father, that he had not travelled south in peace.

And it would have sounded so reasonable and justifiable.

Instead, the power of the gospel and the response of the people, led to peace.

Tarore and Ngakuku and Te Uita and Ripihau and Katu proclaimed a grace that was wide and generous.

Faithful to grace that reaches to a widow in a group we despise and to a man leading a group intent on killing us.

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