



KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

10am – Sunday 7 February 2021

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Waitangi Weekend

Music to prepare us for worship “*Andante*” Douglas Lilburn,
“*Tuba Tune*” C S Lang (was a British organist, born in New Zealand, 1891-1971), “*Prelude*” Gareth Farr

Please place your offering in the offering boxes at the back of the church, if possible before worship commences.

Introit “*The Lord is my shepherd*”

Psalm 23, music David Childs (NZ composer)
organ/ Carolyn Schmid, piano/ Sara Brown

Call to worship

(based on Psalm 121)

Kia noho a Ihowā ki a koutou. The Lord be with you.

Mā Ihowa koe e manaaki. And also with you.

Hīkina o koutou ngakau. Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Kia whakawhetai tātou ki a Ihowā. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Our help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Let us worship God.

Hymn

(tune: Dunedin by Vernon Griffiths) AA 155 - Shirley Murray

1 Where mountains rise to open skies
your name, O God, is echoed far,
from island beach to kauri’s reach, in
water’s light, in lake and star.

2 Your people’s heart, your people’s
part be in our caring for this land,
for faith to flower, for aroha to let each
other’s mana stand.

3 From broken word, from conflict
stirred, from lack of vision, set us free
to see the line of your design, to feel
creation’s energy.

4 Your love be known, compassion
shown, that every child have equal
scope:

in justice done, in trust begun shall be
our heritage and hope.

5 Where mountains rise to open skies
your way of peace distil the air,
your spirit bind all humankind, one
covenant of life to share!

Prayer of praise and confession

We pause, O God, to contemplate the works of your hands,
to consider the multitude of the stars,
a universe expanding beyond anything we can imagine;
to attend to the thin layer of gas, protecting us from the cold, dark of space,
stretched out like a canvas around the earth,
a tent in which all things live and move and have their being;
We are mindful of this world, so fragile and yet so breathtakingly beautiful;
a theatre, displaying your glory, mirroring your grace, signifying your mystery;
a theatre in which we are actors, participants in the drama of your salvation.
and in which all things are directed to your good purposes.
Praise to you.

In considering your glory, O God, we become all too aware of our frailty.
The grass withers, the flower fades, and we too come and go.
Towers and skyscrapers will one day crumble, empires rise and fall.
But you, O God, are eternal.
We confess that you are God and we are not.
Forgive us when we play god,
asserting our dominance and power over others and over your world.
Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

During the prayer, the following refrain will be sung:

E te ariki, kia aroha mai

E te karaiti, kia aroha mai

E te ariki, kia aroha mai, kia aroha mai

O Lord, have mercy, have mercy on us

O Christ, have mercy, have mercy on us

O Lord, have mercy, have mercy on us, have mercy on us.

Assurance of forgiveness and passing of the peace

E te whanau a te Karaiti, brothers and sisters in Christ, we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Kia tau te rangimarie o te Karaiti ki runga i a koutou. May the peace of Christ be with you always. **And also with you.**

Invitation

Interlude *“And I saw a new heaven- for the former things are passed away”*

text from Revelation,
music K Knudson (2015)

First Reading: Isaiah 40:21-31

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them,

and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

*Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church **Thanks be to God***

Gospel Reading: Mark 1:29-39

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

*This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ **Praise to Christ the Word***

Sermon "The Sovereignty of God"

I.

Today, on this Waitangi weekend, I want to talk about God as sovereign. What does it mean to say God is sovereign? We might think of a sovereign as an absent monarch, ruling from afar. But Isaiah and Mark would disagree with this image of God. God exercises sovereignty as one deeply involved, sustaining this world.

I have a confession to make: I'm not much of a gardener. I don't so much garden as wrestle with my plants, trying to assert my dominance and beat them into submission. And yet I can't help but feel it's a losing battle! The wet summer we've been having is resulting in an abundance of life. Weeds are sprouting up from every crack and crevice. My cabbages, which I thought I planted far enough apart, are now vying for space like three fully-grown men, man-spreading in the back-seat of a car. I don't trust the pumpkins. Their long, thorny tendrils are always creeping, creeping. I'm scared I might wake up one night with one of the tendrils strangling me in my sleep. And that's to say nothing of the hordes of convolvulus constantly threatening to invade! The thin fence separating my garden from the invading hordes doesn't stand a chance. I'm constantly amazed by the abundant growth and life.

But even in harsher and inhospitable climates, like the arid, rocky land that covers much of ancient Israel, life is present, even thriving in innovative and ingenious ways. A couple of weeks ago, I was walking the Kepler, up Mt. Luxmore, above the tree-line. The hut ranger was showing us the various tussocks, mosses, hebes, fungi, and flowers, each of which has evolved to use the unforgiving weather to its advantage and even to thrive in these climates.

There is perhaps a note of hope here, when we consider our current ecological crisis. We talk a lot about climate change as an existential threat. And for human beings (and many thousands of species of flora and fauna) it's not an inaccurate description. We must do everything we can to mitigate its effects. Yet, I heard it said recently, that regardless of human action or inaction, the ecosystems of the world will heal themselves eventually. It might take a few ten-thousand years. Not even the awful destructive power of

bottomless human greed can undo the insatiable thirst for life that is in the world around us, beneath us, above us. There is a fragile but irrepressible vivacity in the world that can't be quenched.

While science today tells us more and more about the mechanics of life and how this world works in all its complexity, it does not presume (or should not presume) to explain where this insatiable thirst for life comes from in the first place; and to what end or purpose. The why and wherefore of existence.

Isaiah saw the insatiable thirst for life in the world and saw in it a divine will. A divine intentionality in everything that exists. An eternal Word that creates and sustains all things in every moment in accordance with the unchanging and eternal will of the Creator. "The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the Word of God will stand forever."

John Calvin said similarly. He described this world as the "theatre of God's glory", *theatrum gloriae*. Why don't we use phrases like that anymore? God's glory, Calvin writes, "is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse." For Calvin, the whole created world in its fragile and miraculous beauty points beyond itself. It is sacramental, a visible sign, pointing to the incomprehensible, transcendent mystery of God.

Both Isaiah and Calvin are describing not only *that* God is sovereign, but *how* God is sovereign in our world. God is not sovereign like an absent queen, exercising power from over the oceans. In fact, it might be more helpful to think of God's sovereignty as a verb. God is the One who sustains and nourishes all life, directing things towards their true end. To say God is sovereign is to say God is actively and intimately involved in this world; to see in the insatiable thirst for life a will or intentionality; that all things are geared towards life and not death; towards flourishing and not corruption; towards fullness and not nothingness.

II.

Isaiah goes further. He sees a deep and natural connection between the thirst for life in the world around us, and the thirst for life in human beings: call it a disposition towards hope; call it a yearning in human beings for justice, for freedom, for autonomy, for flourishing and peaceful existence. To wait on the Lord is, for Isaiah, to orient ourselves to the fullness of human existence as God's intends and to be restored and strengthened in accordance with its coming.

Saint Paul uses the word *groaning*, the whole creation groans in labour pains as something new is being born. This new creation that God's Spirit is bringing about.

We heard that same yearning in the words of Amanda Gorman, the young African-American poet, who spoke at President Joe Biden's inauguration. "The dawn is ours before we knew it," she said. "Somehow we do it. Somehow we've witnessed a nation that isn't broken, but simply unfinished." That word *unfinished* says so much. She infers that there is a finish that lies ahead, an end, a goal they're heading to, a fulfilment towards which the hopes of the American nation are oriented. The dawn is already rising. For Gorman, the light is ever present: we simply need to step out of the shade. The light cannot be extinguished. The insatiable thirst for life cannot be quenched.

We have heard the same song for decades in our own country. In 1984, Sir Justice Joe Williams released a song entitled *Maranga ake ai*, or "rise up again and again". At the time, it caused a bit of a stir because of its evocative lyrics and anti-establishment tone. "There's a movement, a movement on the street / people moving, they shuffle to the beat / I hear them talking, talking on the street / Where's my freedom from oppression, cos' that's what my people need." Like in Amanda Gorman's poem, there's a sense of movement *towards* something. There is a goal. The reggae beat is the music of a people on the move. Towards justice. Towards freedom. Towards life.

Isaiah and Calvin would point to God's sovereignty. God who is at work in everything sustaining, nourishing, fulfilling.

What we hear in Gorman and Williams is an ancient and recurring theme. We hear the same song in the words of Isaiah, who wrote to the people of Israel in exile in Babylon. For Israel at the time, the sovereignty of Babylon, their power and dominance was so complete, that the people began to question God's faithfulness to them. God had abandoned them to the hands of their oppressors. Isaiah seeks to settle and comfort. God's sovereignty is no abstract doctrine of a God ruling from afar. These words of praise to God are the source of pastoral comfort in the midst of deep uncertainty. Isaiah directs the people's attention beyond their immediate situation towards the stars and the magnitude of the universe stretched out like a canvas, a tent in which all things live and move and have their being. Isaiah extols the *glory* of God. In the

light of such glory, even the rulers of the earth are like grasshoppers. Even the empire of Babylon will rise and fall like a garden plant.

III.

One can hardly avoid the geopolitical and social implications of Isaiah's message. The sovereignty of God is a direct challenge to the power of those who exercise sovereignty over others. Wherever life is diminished, wherever freedom is taken away, wherever the autonomy and rights of another are not recognised, God's Spirit is working to bring about justice, renewing, strengthening. It's hard to hear those words on Waitangi weekend, without drawing connections to our own situation in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We are a treaty people, a covenant people, committed to reconciliation, and to equal partnership. There is an increasing recognition of this in principle. In practice however we hear time and again that it's not the case, that the sovereignty of Māori as equal, covenant partners is not recognised.

With regard to land, to waterways, to culture, to language, to people. In recent times, we can think of Ihumatao; the controversies surrounding Oranga Tamariki; the poor conditions of Waikeria prison, the inmates of which are disproportionately Māori and Pāšifika; in just the last few days the question of Māori representation on regional councils and the formation of Māori wards has been raised. Māori are saying again and again that they are not represented and their interests are not being upheld.

The word "sovereignty" is perhaps one of the most contentious in New Zealand today because it gets to the heart of the mistranslation of the Treaty. In Article One, the English version gives the Queen of England "all rights and powers of sovereignty". The reo version uses the word Kāwanatanga, perhaps best translated "governorship". The problem is that sovereignty is perhaps most accurately translated "rangatiratanga" or "mana", something the Māori chiefs would never have ceded to the Queen of England. In fact, in the reo of Article Two, which talks about land possession, Māori explicitly maintain *rangatiratanga* over their land, villages, and taonga. You can see where the misunderstanding arose. A misunderstanding that is continuing to have an effect today.

IV.

Where do we even begin? How do we step out of the shade? The practicalities are so complex and large. As a Pākehā, I seek to be well informed but I can never know what it means to be Māori in Aotearoa today, nor would I presume to know what the solutions might look like.

We might begin, as followers of Jesus, to look to how God exercises sovereignty and to witness to that with words and with actions. In our gospel reading today, we see God's sovereignty in the world begins small and intimate. God undermines the powers of the world not through revolution and military might, but through the small and apparently insignificant. Jesus, who ministers with the authority and power of the sovereign God, enters into the home of a sick woman, in a small fishing town, in rural Galilee, on the edges of the Roman Empire. And *there* heals her, restores her dignity, enables her and empowers her to act as host to Jesus and his guests. This work of restoration, of giving life, begins in the intimacy of the home. By evening Jesus steps out into the street and the city gathers around. And the next morning Jesus heads throughout all Galilee and eventually to Jerusalem. It's the inner logic of our gospel passage today and indeed of God's sovereign power in the world.

There is a challenge in this for us. God's sovereign action involves you and me and our daily interactions. In Aotearoa, you and I are all treaty partners, called to partner with one another, protect the taonga of one another, and participate in the work of reconciliation together. We don't need changes at the national level to begin this mahi.

But there is also comfort in the knowledge that it is not up to us. God is sovereign, creating and sustaining all things and bringing all things by the Spirit to their true end in the fullness of time. As Amanda Gorman says, "May we learn to lift our gaze above what stands between us to what stands before us." Amen.

Sung response "Te Aroha"

Te Puoho Katene (1992)

Dedication of offering

Hymn

NZ National Anthem

1 E Ihowā Atua,
O ngā iwi mātou rā
Āta whakarangona;
Me aroha noa
Kia hua ko te pai;
Kia tau tō atawhai;
Manaakitia mai
Aotearoa

2 God of Nations at Thy feet,
in the bonds of love we meet,
hear our voices, we entreat,
God defend our free land.
Guard Pacific's triple star
from the shafts of strife and war,
make her praises heard afar,
God defend New Zealand.

3 Ōna mano tāngata
Kiri whero, kiri mā,
Iwi Māori, Pākehā,
Rūpeke katoa,
Nei ka tono ko ngā hē
Māu e whakaahu kē,
Kia ora mārire
Aotearoa

4 Men of every creed and race,
gather here before Thy face,
asking Thee to bless this place,
God defend our free land.
From dissension, envy, hate,
and corruption guard our state,
make our country good and great,
God defend New Zealand.

Prayer for others and the Lord's Prayer Linda Holloway (Anglican prayer book)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the
glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

**E tō mātou Matua i te rangi
Kia tapu tōu Ingoa.
Kia tae mai tōu rangatiratanga.
Kia meatia tāu e pai ai
ki runga ki te whenua,
kia rite anō ki tō te rangi.
Hōmai ki a mātou āiane
he taro mā mātou mō tēnei rā.
Murua ō mātou hara,
Me mātou hoki e muru nei
i ō te hunga e hara ana ki a mātou.
Āua hoki mātou e kawea kia
whakawaia;
Engari whakaorangia mātou i te kino:
Nōu hoki te rangatiratanga, te kaha,
me te korōria, Āke āke āke. Āmine.**

Hymn

1 Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation,
racing across the sky, trailing bright clouds of elation;
sun of delight succeeds the velvet of night,
warming the earth's exultation.

2 Sing for God's power that shatters the chains that would bind us,
searing the darkness of fear and despair that could blind us;
touching our shame with love that will not lay blame,
reaching out gently to find us.

Benediction

We go in the power of Spirit
Through whom Christ is with us
Drawing us into the drama salvation,
Restoring our souls,
And bringing all things to their proper end
To the glory of God, now and forever, Amen.

Postlude *"Set me a seal upon your heart"*

K Knudson (1996)

Serving today

Minister - Kerry Enright (0274675542)
Associate Minister - Jordan Redding
Organist and Choir Director - Karen Knudson
Reader - Chris Bloore
Prayer for others - Linda Holloway

In relation to your monetary offering, you may:

- *Make regular automatic payments (which are tax deductible) - contact Helen Thew at plannedgiving@knoxchurch.net*
- *Give online to the Church's bank account at 03 0903 0016425 00 - our charity number for tax rebate purposes is #CC52318*
- *Give before the service, into the offering boxes at the back of the church*