

**'An enchanted world' a sermon based on Proverbs 8:22-36 and John 1:1-9, 14-18, preached at Knox Church Dunedin by Kerry Enright on 15 August 2021**

In New Zealand, it is sometimes thought that Christian faith is an interest for religious people, that religion is a category off to the side of life, with its own pocket, in a separate realm unrelated to the rest of life. I want to talk about the Christian faith in a way that has to do with living in New Zealand, in the belief that the Christian faith has to do with the whole of life. I need to be brief, so I will be making sweeping generalisations that need more unpacking than we have time for.

An introduction ... The Christian faith sees God at work in the world. And we believe that God invites us, woos us and empowers us to participate in what God is doing in the world. The task before us, always, is to judge whether the invitation we receive is of God. If we believe it is of God, we seek to join in. We have criteria for making that choice. Central is what we know about Jesus of Nazareth and what he points to and what we learn from our study of the Bible and the study of Christian and other history. For example, the Bible is clear about the value of creation, so we participate in actions that enhance creation. The Bible is clear about justice for the oppressed, so we participate in actions that address oppression. We are constantly invited to participate in movements taking us towards the world God wants or away from the world God wants. Our work is to discern which is which. We do that discerning together. We talk together, reflect together, pray together, study together, act together.

Our study of history shows that there were times we thought something was good when it wasn't. Sometimes we confused what our culture told us with what we thought God wanted. Sometimes we were so confident about the way we had learned to do things, we said it was God's way. When Pakeha first settled this land, they thought that their way of doing things was the right way and that what was already here was wrong. To describe what happened I am using an image of the scholar Moana Jackson, the image of house. Jackson says that Pakeha who came to New Zealand thought the colonial house was better than the Maori house. So, they pushed the Maori house aside. They asked everyone, including Maori, to live in the settler house, the colonial house, the house from Britain. The education system, the legal system, the religious system, all our systems assumed the western house was best and they became the operating systems in our country. The way of living and thinking that had evolved for about 800 years and was still evolving, was pushed aside, ignored and suppressed.

It's called colonisation and there are problems with it, not least in doing terrible harm to the identity of the people whose home was pushed aside. And theologically there are problems. We believe that God was here before the settlers, before the missionaries, before the colonisers. In the lore and custom of Maori, there were signs of the wisdom of God. And that wisdom is, in various forms, still available to us. After 200 years of a dominant western way of seeing the world, we are learning that there are parts of the western way of living that damage the planet, and divide humanity, and dishonour the divine. As we see the limitations of the colonial house, we are being offered wisdom in the indigenous house.

Let me give a small example. Maori spirituality sees all of reality as connected. God, humankind and creation are not to be separated. In Maori theology, the earth is our mother, our papatuanuku. We belong to the earth; the earth does not belong to us. More than that, the world is full of Spirit. The various atua highlight different dimensions of the glory of our world, of divine activity, of God's participation in the world. The world is an enchanted world, a world with possibilities for respectful engagement, for creaturely solidarity, for wonder and mystery. The western approach at its worst took away the enchantment of the world. Our world became something to be owned, used, dominated. So sensing its limitations and valuing indigenous wisdom, New Zealand is amid a process of decolonisation. We are learning to receive what was here before Pakeha arrived. This movement has been happening for decades, and it is gaining pace, enough to make a difference to our country, and thereby to our church.

Let me give a personal story of what is happening. One evening about two months ago at the camping ground at which I was staying, I met students and teachers from my old school and they invited me back to the school, Waiuku College. The area is rich in history, especially pre-settler history and relating to the Waikato War. North of Waiuku is the Manukau Peninsula. Over the last thirty years, an elder of the local hapu and others have been tracking historic pa sites and have found around 40 or 50, nearly all on farm land. This was a heavily populated area, just across from Auckland, across from Ihumatao where there is a land claim and there were protests last year. The farmers that have the pa sites offered to help, so each of the pa sites is being marked with stones and on maps. The young people were at Port Waikato because they were learning local history by going to these places. They were journeying through the area, starting at the top of the Manukau peninsula. They learned that the Maori King had his winter residence there, so that took them into the history of the king movement, the story of the kings, the war and the confiscations and the process of colonisation.

They walked over the portage where Maori used to drag their waka and they kayaked down the stream that took people on to the Waikato River then to the inland of the North Island before there were roads and trains. They learned about the thriving economy and the trade in which Maori were involved. A kaumatua travelled with them, so they saw how place connected to history, connected to spirituality. They were taken further into their history and spirituality. They were on a process of re-enchantment. In recent years, that school had built a whareniui at the front of the school, the large meeting house that are on marae, and it is used to welcome people and mark transitions. The Principal had learned te reo Maori and was now teaching it and there was a growing cohort of Maori teachers and support staff. The relationship with the local hapu was deepening and the local marae was becoming more of a home for students.

The primary schools in the area were meeting to plan how they could be part of this growing movement. And it is growing. In Hamilton, 700 teachers and principals met to talk about what they could do under an initiative called Ngaa Puna o Wairere. In Dunedin, there have been similar gatherings. In education, in the schooling of our young people, tamariki and rangatahi, a movement is underway. Also in law. Law students are being encouraged to learn te reo Maori and about Maori lore, l-o-r-e. In the Police. A former policeman told me that in Taranaki, non-commissioned officers had been required to do a course on decolonisation since the 1990s. In the Church, theological training places are teaching Maori theology, something the Presbyterian Church was doing for its students in the 1970s and 1980s.

There is a movement underway and it has the potential to change how people see themselves and their world. Decolonisation has the potential, if we are thoughtful about it, to help us grow to be a more human, reflecting more of God's purpose for us and our world. Let's keep listening and studying and praying together to discern the way ahead.

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