

'The ministry of reconciliation' a sermon based on Micah 4:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 5:16-20 preached at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand by Kerry Enright on Sunday 8 August 2021

Last Sunday afternoon's apology by the government for the Dawn Raids in the 1970s - what an event! The sounds were played of Police dogs barking, demands to surrender, bashing in of doors, of children crying. Then we saw the ritual of Ifoga, the placing of the mat over the Prime Minister's head, the lifting of the mat, the giving of mats and the embracing. There was singing and praying, the honest telling and resolve, the drama and speeches, the Bible and even a sermon – and these words from the Prime Minister:

"The government expresses its sorrow, remorse and regret that the Dawn Raids and random police checks occurred and that these actions were ever considered appropriate. Our government conveys to the future generations of Aotearoa that the past actions of the Crown were wrong, and that the treatment of your ancestors was wrong. We convey to you our deepest and sincerest apology."

It was an action of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation, another step on a journey.

It reflects Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19: "God reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting the trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us."

The gift of the ministry of reconciliation, the capacity to heal broken relationships, severely broken relationships, strained relationships, that comes from a power beyond ourselves, that does not originate in us, but we can enter into it with humble hearts and open hands and courage, if we dare receive it. The gift of the ministry of reconciliation that flows from God reaching towards the world, towards us, towards all peoples, and drawing us into a life-giving relationship with God's self, God not counting all the ways we have trespassed against God. The gift of the ministry and message of reconciliation that flows from God reconciling us to God's self in Christ, a reconciliation that flows into all our relationships. Here is a gift for each of us and all of us, rooted beyond our struggles and failures and triumphs in relating.

Miroslav Volf of Yale - Because 'Reconciliation between God and humanity is at the heart of the Gospel we proclaim; reconciliation between human beings estranged on account of injustice, deception and violence must be at the centre of the mission we pursue. This difficult task of reconciliation should command our imagination, our intelligence, and our resources'.

John de Gruchy of South Africa identifies four distinct but interrelated ways of speaking about reconciliation. The first refers to a restored relationship between God and humans. Secondly, the interpersonal, refers to the relations between individuals. Thirdly, the social, refers to the reconciliation between alienated communities on a local

neighbourhood level. Finally the political, refers to projects such as the process of national reconciliation in South Africa and Northern Ireland.

I want to bring that home to New Zealand. Vincent O'Malley has written a book on the Waikato War, a significant book, over 600 pages. O'Malley believes that the war that has had most impact on our nation is not the First World War or the Second World War, but the Waikato War, and the date that marked out our future as much as any, was 12 July 1863. On that day, General Cameron led Crown troops across the Mangatawhiri Stream into the Waikato, to begin the War. 12th of July 1863. Governor Grey had, for the size of our nation, the largest army in the Empire.

Why is the 12th of July so important? If the Treaty of Waitangi marked the constitutional establishment of our nation, the Waikato War marked the social and economic cleaving of our nation. The invasion of the Waikato was our country attacking our own people. The crossing of that stream was a cleaving within the body of our nation, a cleaving between Maori and Pakeha, that we are still working to overcome.

Why the invasion? In the 1850s, Maori leaders could see how land was being sold without order or fairness. They could see that as more immigrants arrived, there was growing disorder among Maori. Some Maori leaders had been to Britain and saw how the King brought order there. Among others, Wiremu Tamihana from near Matamata, proposed the establishment of a kingship among Maori. Tamihana was a Christian convert, as were many of the Maori leaders of the time. His father had been a great warrior but Tamihana, now a Christian, was committed to the ways of peace. Tribal leaders met and talked. They persuaded Potatau Te Wherowhero to become king. He was an old man and after two years, he died. He was followed by his son King Tawhiao.

The Crown saw that this new movement was going to make land settlement more difficult. In the meantime, Auckland was filling with people. Land speculators were on the hunt for land to satisfy the thirst. We know some of their names, like Russell and Whitaker. Grey made up a threat that the King and his people were going to attack Auckland and that the King movement was a challenge to Queen Victoria. Nothing was further from the truth. In long letter after long letter, Tamihana tried to explain what the Kingitanga was about and that it was committed to protecting the settlers as long as they didn't try to occupy the Waikato. For example, Te Wherowhero had built a house near what is now the Auckland Museum precisely to protect Pakeha. Waikato Maori were providing Auckland with food without which the people of Auckland would have starved. The economy was flourishing with trade among Maori and Pakeha, between the Waikato and Auckland, continuing to grow. Many Pakeha lived safely, protected by Maori. Grey and other leaders made up a story in order to take land, and they succeeded.

Once the Mangatawhiri stream was crossed, the Crown troops moved south, with a series of battles, until the atrocity in the township of Rangiawhiao. Crown and Maori

had agreed that Rangiahiao would be a haven for non-combatants, but women and children and old men were burnt alive and killed by Crown troops. Then the Crown began the process of confiscating the land of people they categorised as rebels. In the 1860s and gradually in the years following, Waikato Maori lost all their land, except for small pockets given back to those few people judged as loyal to the Crown. That cleaving and its consequences is still the biggest challenge we face as a nation in terms of the ministry and message of reconciliation.

The good news is that the gift of reconciliation is still being offered and taken up, so that in our time we can continue that ministry. There was the land settlement agreed between Tainui and the Crown, although it represented only 2% of the unimproved value of the land that was taken. And we are seeing a revival, a renewal, an awakening in many areas of our life, as Maori are giving back to our nation a way of seeing the world, a connection with the land, a matauranga, a spirituality that was taken from us.

The gift, the take, is for us as Christians especially, to pick up, because those leaders were members of the same body of Christ to which we belong, followers with us of Jesus Christ. The gift, the take, is for us because in the form of missionaries, we were there at Waitangi, persuading Maori to sign and assuring them that the Treaty would be honoured. Today, again, we are being offered opportunities to participate in the ministry of reconciliation in Aotearoa. At this table, we receive the gift of that ministry and message. We act out the gift of reconciliation as we stand around the table, as we break the bread, as we drink the wine, for we are all members of one body.

God was in Christ, reconciling us to God's self, to each other, and to papatuanuku, our earth mother.

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Knox Church

449 George Street

Dunedin

New Zealand

Ph. (03) 477 0229

www.knoxchurch.net

Kerry Enright: 027 467 5542, minister@knoxchurch.net

