

## Service – January 21 2018

### **The Battle of Gate Pa**

Today I am going to tell you a story about a battle and as I was preparing and thinking about war and about Christians who go to war the verse from Colossians 3:17 (slide 1) came to mind. It says, 'whatever you say or do should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, as you give thanks to God the Father because of him.'

**Slide 2** In The Message its expressed this way, 'Let every detail in your lives— words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.'

What a challenge. This is a hard verse at the best of times! We definitely need God's help with this.

What this verse says is that as Christians we are called to represent God in all we do, wherever we find ourselves... even in hard places, even to people we consider our enemies or maybe especially to people we consider our enemies. And when we do this, when we live in the name of Jesus, our world is transformed. Our world and the Western world in particular has been shaped by Christianity, so much so that we are often unaware of the impact Jesus and his followers have had on our world and culture.

**Slide 3** **What areas of our lives have been transformed by Christians living out Colossians 3:17?** Call out your ideas... Education, medicine, science, the position of women and children and slavery, all these things have been influenced by people who were motivated by their love for Jesus and by their desire to serve him and obey him, to obey Jesus' command to love God and to love other people. We see this in the pages of history time and time again.

What we also see in the pages of history time and time again is that people cannot seem to stop fighting each other. The history of the world is filled with war and conflict... And as I have prepared for today I have struggled with how the message of Colossians 3:17 applies in a war zone, how does it apply when Christians choose to take up arms and fight because they feel this is what God has asked them to do? I don't know. But what I do know is that there have been great Christian people, who even in the midst of death and destruction, have reflected the love of God; who have done what they could to stand up for

the 'right' thing, to be obedient to the voice of God in every detail of their lives. And even the way we fight wars has been changed by Christians.

**Slide 4** Two examples of this from the 19<sup>th</sup> century are Henry Dunant and Florence Nightingale... **who are these people? discuss in your table groups or with the person sitting next to you.**

**Slide 5** Florence Nightingale pioneered modern nursing whilst caring for injured soldiers during the Crimean War in 1854. She described her work as being a call from God who had asked her if she would do good for him alone.

**Slide 6** Henry Dunant was the founder of the international red cross. He was shocked by the suffering in the aftermath of the battle of Soferino in Italy 1859 – 23 000 dead, injured, and dying lay on the battlefield without medical care. Dunant created makeshift hospitals and organised people to help soldiers, no matter what side they fought on. He lobbied governments about the need for medical care in war and for the humane treatment of prisoners and the injured.

1864 the first Geneva convention was signed based on his ideas... this is an international agreement about the treatment of people captured and wounded during wartime. It promises protection for hospitals, and civilians and impartial treatment for wounded soldiers.

What was Dunant's inspiration? His Christian faith and his deep conviction that being a Christian meant making society better for all people – he was loving God and loving others.

War is part of our NZ history too but we also have stories of Christ followers whose actions and words reflect the love of God even in the midst of a battlefield. We saw this last year when we looked at the story of Parihaka and today we are going to look at another NZ story, this one a bit closer to home. We have our own Florence Nightingale and Henry Dunant who were living in Tauranga at the same time, the 1860s, and who stood up for the same values and for the same reasons, because of their love for God and their desire to follow him in difficult places.

Today I am going to tell you the story of the Battle of Gate Pa, a story from Tauranga's own history, because it is important we know our own stories as New Zealanders and as Christians and I believe that God continues to speak to

us in the pages of our history. Will you let him speak to you today? If so, please stand and pray with me.

### **Slide 7 Prayer**

**Lord, we are listening. May you speak to us today, may we have open ears to hear, may we have mouths willing to speak your words, May our actions reflect your love and may our lives serve you and others. Amen**

**Slide 8** In 1864 war was raging in the Waikato over land and some Tauranga Maori joined the fight. In response the Government sent soldiers to Tauranga to stop the supplies of food, ammunition and warriors getting through to the Waikato.

In charge are Lieutenant Colonel Henry Greer and Lieutenant Colonel Henry Booth. **Who lives in Greerton?** They set up camp at Te Papa, just in front of the Elms Mission house and built the Monmouth and Durham redoubts (which is a fancy way of saying fort) to protect it.

This heavy military presence made the local tribe Ngai Te Rangi very nervous. They saw this as a threat to their land and assumed they would eventually be attacked and so they adopted a strategy designed to provoke Greer to attack a position they had carefully prepared in advance. They wanted to control where the inevitable battle took place. Ngai Te Rangi sent Greer a series of challenges – challenging him to fight and even offering to build a road to the pa they wished him to attack. Greer didn't bite... so they stepped up their plan, attacking the Te Papa camp one night and then provocatively building a pa close to the British base. **Slide 9** This was at Pukehinahina ridge, only 4 kilometres away from the Te Papa military camp and this became known as Gate Pa.

**Does anyone know why it was called that?** Became known as Gate Pa because it had a gate in the fence, that ran along the border of the Maori and Mission lands, allowing carts to pass through. **Does anyone live in Gate Pa?**

So Ngai Te Rangi engineered and built their fortifications right on the boundary of Maori land and Mission land.

This was an unacceptable risk to the British and Greer asked for reinforcements. The Maori had at last succeeded in inducing the British to attack them on a battlefield of their choosing.

**Who arrived with the reinforcements and to take over command? General Cameron. Slide 10 What was named after him? Anyone drive on Cameron Road to get here this morning?**

Along with Cameron's soldiers, 600 sailors and Royal Marines disembark from ships in the harbour. By the end of April, 1 689 British soldiers and sailors are in Tauranga ready for battle.

On the other side are Ngai te Rangi and their supporters who number...**anyone know or want to have a guess?**

230! What? 230 versus almost 1700! Reinforcements who were making their way to Tauranga to support Ngai te Rangi were stopped and didn't make it.

**What would you be thinking if you were British? If you were from Ngai te Rangi?** Surely there is no way Maori can win this fight! This is a real David and Goliath battle.

The night before the battle some British officers dine at the Elms Mission house **slide 11** with Archdeacon Brown and his wife, where they took communion together. During the night Greer and 700 men march around to the far side of the Pukehinahina Pa, surrounding it so there can be no escape for those inside.

**Slide 12** At first light on April 29<sup>th</sup> 1864 on a cold and damp morning a concentrated offensive by the British begins, later described as the heaviest military bombardment of the NZ wars. Maori place their flagpole well behind the centre of the pa, causing British gunners to overshoot their target. They use heavy artillery and by 4pm, after 9 hours, the British charge, having made a break in the outer defence.

The British are surprised that they meet very little resistance – they enter the pa virtually unchallenged. Once they are inside the walls of the Pa, however, they discover the Maori inside have set a trap – and they have walked right into it. Maori warriors have been hiding in underground bunkers, holding their fire, and they now start shooting volleys from underneath the British soldiers' feet. The pa was an amazing example of engineering – it made extensive use of concealed trenches which tricked the British. It was a trap which worked brilliantly, a 'well executed Maori plan.' Before long many British officers are killed or wounded – only one officer who took communion at the Elms Mission house the night before survived. The soldiers panic and are driven out of the pa in a disorderly retreat which leaves 100 wounded and dead behind.

Heavy rain continues to fall and under the cover of night Maori quietly abandon Gate Pa. They take their wounded and disappear.

At 5am the next morning, a sailor creeps into the pa and finds it deserted. British dead and injured are carried from the battlefield.

General Cameron returned to Auckland – **how do you think he was feeling?** defeated and embarrassed.

This appeared in a NZ Newspaper a year later: **slide 13** ‘the night of the 29<sup>th</sup> of April was, in the British camp at Tauranga, a night of deep humiliation... The men were disgraced in their own eyes, and what would the people of England say?’

And who were these fine British forces defeated by? ‘Not by forces equal to them in arms and discipline; not by foemen worthy of their steel; but by a horde of half-naked, half-armed savages, whom they had been taught to despise.’

Of course we find these comments distasteful today. Many excuses for the defeat were given by the British from cowardice to poor leadership – They didn’t want to face the truth they had been outclassed by what has been called by modern historians an amazing feat of engineering and inspired tactical leadership.

But to me, this is not the most remarkable part of this story. I want to introduce you to a young Ngai Te Rangi leader named Henare Taratoa. **Slide 14** **Who has heard of him before?** He had been educated and baptised by missionary Henry Williams, and had travelled the country with Bishop Selwyn, the first bishop of NZ. When he returned to Tauranga in 1861 he set up a school for teaching arithmetic and Christianity. Who wants to go to that school

When British troops started arriving in Tauranga, a meeting of Ngai Te Rangi leaders was held. Even though Taratoa knew war was inevitable he wanted to make sure mercy was shown to those wounded during the fighting and so a code of practise for battle was written. This became known as Taratoa’s code of conduct and it is very similar in its values to the Geneva code which was signed in Switzerland four months after the Battle of Gate Pa. Isn’t it amazing that God was doing similar work through his people at the same time but on different sides of the planet.

His first rule was about wounded or captured enemies. He wrote these people should be saved as long as they gave up their weapons.

Rule number two was about unarmed enemies – if they were captured, they should be handed over for trial unharmed.

The third rule was about soldiers who were overcome by fear and ran away. If they fled to a priest's house, they would be safe and not followed.

The fourth and final rule was about women and children. If they were unarmed, they would not be harmed.

The code was signed by Maori chiefs from Tauranga Moana and a copy was sent to Lt Col Greer.

**Slide 15** Interestingly, before we move on, in the background to this picture you can see a red flag flying. This is the flag that flew above Gate Pa. This is what it looks like up close... the symbols on it represent the Christian cross, the star of Bethlehem and the crescent moon which may have represented the Old Testament – all on a red background, because this was a sacred colour. This is the flag the warriors of Ngai te Rangi fought under. You may have seen this flag and not realised it was from Gate Pā **slide 16** as it now hangs in the memorial to those who died in the New Zealand Wars at the Auckland War Memorial Museum, alongside the Union Jack.

Taratoa stayed true to his code in the battle of Gate Pa. **Slide 17** During the night following the battle, he took water to the wounded lying on the battlefield, including Lt-Col Booth who received gunshot wounds to his spine and right arm and who died the following day, but not before telling others of the kindness he had received during the night.

Taratoa was killed at the battle of Te Ranga, several months later. Pyes Pa road runs through the site of the Te Ranga pa and is named after captain Charles Pye. **Who lives in Pyes pa?** As far as I know, there isn't a suburb in Tauranga named after Taratoa...

**Slide 18** On his body was found a copy of the code of conduct along with the words from Romans 12:20...

If your enemies are hungry,  
give them something to eat.  
And if they are thirsty,

give them something  
to drink.

Taratoa obeyed these words – for him these words from scripture were not something to read and then conveniently forget when it is hard... These were words to live by.

In our service a few weeks ago Declan talked about the symbolism of water. In this story, water is not only a necessity of life but a symbol of kindness and compassion. **Slide 19** **Who is it that God wants you to show kindness and compassion to?** Maybe as you have listened to this story, a name has come to mind, maybe you don't know their name but a specific person is in your thoughts, maybe it is a type of person (eg the homeless) that God wants you to show his love to. **Who will you show God's kindness and compassion?** We are going to pause at this point for you to write a name on one of the bits of paper on your tables... spread them around, and then I want you to fold it up, so no one can see the name (and they will remain anonymous)... and some children are going to come round with these water jugs and I want you to put your piece of paper in the jug as a sign of our commitment to love God and love others... and as a challenge to ourselves to act and speak in the name of Jesus. Like Taratoa, we want to love God and love others...

Another person credited with giving water to the injured after the battle was a woman named Heni Te Kiri Karamu or Heni Pore. **Slide 20** She also spent time at Henry William's mission and she was an educated woman who could speak fluent English and French as well as Maori. She was involved in mission her whole life, becoming secretary of the Maori mission in Rotorua later in her life. She was courageous, a wahine toa, woman warrior, and her gender did not limit her determination to fight. She assisted in the construction of the fortifications at Gate Pa and when the women were told to leave, she refused, staying with her brother. Because she was part European, she said the rules about no women on a battlefield did not apply to her. I think she is probably one of NZ's first feminists. She declared:

'I shall not leave the pa unless my brother leaves also. If it is right that he should stay, then I am his equal; I can use a gun and I shall stay.'

**Slide 21** She too honoured Taratoa's code of conduct by treating the enemy wounded with compassion and kindness and in some accounts it was she who gave water to the dying Booth... the truth is probably that there were a group

of people who gave water to a number of the dying on the battlefield that night.

War is not a good thing and its not a simple thing to rationalise either. There were Christians on both sides of this battle... at Parihaka the Christians refused to fight, at Gate Pa, they did fight but were committed to treating the enemy, and particularly the wounded and civilians, with mercy and compassion. Which is right? I don't think it's for us to say.

But for me, people like Henry Dunant, Florence Nightingale, Heni te kiri karamu and Henare Taratoa are inspiring and they speak to us today. They are people from the pages of history who are all part of the same story – the story of how God works in our world, especially in the dark moments and the hard places, through the actions and words of his followers. We are part of that same story.

Let's pray – **slide 22**

Dear Jesus – thank you for the stories of brave and committed people who speak to us through the pages of history. Be with us Lord, as we too seek to honour you with the story of our lives.

We pray for the people who are written on these bits of paper and we pray for ourselves. What would you have us do to show them your love and compassion?

May every detail of our lives, whatever we do, whatever we say, wherever we are, be done in your name.

Ma te Atua e manaaki

May God bless you.

Amen