

## All Age Service January 27<sup>th</sup> 2019 – The Gospel in NZ

I am going to share with you today a NZ story. Last year we looked at the battle of Gate Pa and the year before that Parihaka and so its become a bit of an annual thing for me to share a story with you from NZs past...why? Because I really believe that it is important that the church in NZ knows the stories of our past... and actually you could argue that the idea of remembering the past is a key element of being a Christian. One of the sources I used in preparing for today is Jay Ruka's book *Huia come Home* – which we have in our church library. Jay writes 'the Christian life is powerless without memory, without the recollection of the past.' He explains that the Hebrew word which is translated into English as future actually means 'afterward, backwards or after part' and he quotes the theologian Skip Moen (slide 1) who explains 'The Hebrew concept of time is like a man rowing a boat. He sees where he has been, but the future is toward his back. He backs into the future...'

(slide 2) This same idea is expressed in a Maori whakatauki or proverb – 'titiro whakamuri, haere whakamua' - Look to the past, move forward to the future. This is commonly translated 'we walk into the future backwards.'

(slide 3) We are going to pause while we take up our tithes and offerings, and while we do this I have a couple of questions for you to discuss with the people sitting around you...

**We walk into the future backwards - What does this suggest to you?**

**Can you think of some examples in the Bible where God tells his people to remember?**

Feedback

Our past matters – the good and the bad - as individuals but also collectively as a nation and as the church. So with that in mind let's look back at a time in NZ's Christian history. But first let us pray.

Prayer

Today's story isn't about an event or a battle or one person... it is actually a collection of different stories which illustrate something pretty remarkable that happened in NZ when the word of God first arrived here. The hero of today's story is actually the Bible and the power of the word of God. For those of us who call ourselves Christians we believe that this is not just an ordinary book – filled with pages and words. We believe the words of Hebrews 4:11: 'For the word of God is alive and active.' We believe that through this story God reveals himself, he speaks to us and we can be changed.

Has this been true for you?

The word of God is alive and active and it changes people – it has transformative power and this is clearly illustrated in the early days of the gospel coming to NZ.

### **Who knows when the gospel was first preached in NZ?**

Christmas day in 1814, Samuel Marsden preached the first sermon at Oihi Bay, in the Bay of Islands. Surely this would have opened the floodgates with crowds coming to know God...

Well, actually no. For the next twenty years the missionaries who came to NZ had little success. Why? Because Marsden and the first missionaries were proponents of what historians have named the civilised gospel. Marsden was a product of his time, and while he had good intentions he believed the Maori needed civilisation before they could be introduced to Jesus. (slide 4) He wrote:

*Though they appear to be a very superior people in point of mental capacity... they must not be considered by any means so favourably circumstanced for the reception of the gospel, as civilised nations are... since nothing, in my opinion, can pave the way for the introduction of the gospel, but civilisation.*

What Marsden meant by civilisation was European culture which many in his time believed was superior to all others in every way - so the early CMS missionaries spent their time trying to teach the Maori people how to live like Europeans rather than introducing them to Jesus and letting the story of the gospel do its thing – which is changing us into the likeness of Christ rather than the likeness of an English person. Consequently, it was 11 years before the first baptism.

(Slide 5) Ten years later Henry Williams took over running the mission. He had a different strategy. He was adamant the gospel needed to be preached first and foremost and he believed it was important to learn the language, the culture and the customs of the people. Bible translation became a priority and this received a boost with the arrival of Henry's brother William in 1826. (Yes, he was William Williams!) He was an expert in language and picked up Maori easily. Henry commented 'he appears not to learn it, it seems to flow naturally from him.'

This was a really important change in emphasis, but the real game changer came in 1834. William Colenso (slide 6) arrived in the Bay of Islands – **who knows what he brought with him?** A printing press – modern technology! Kids, **what is a piece of technology you would really like to own?** This is the equivalent of that! This is what it looked like (slide 7)... Unfortunately it took 18 months for it to work as some vital parts had not been packed and oh, they had no paper! Over the next 3 years Colenso and William Williams worked at printing a Bible in Te Reo Maori. In 1835, 1000 copies of the sixty-seven page gospel of Luke (Te Rongopai a Ruka) (slide 8) were printed and distributed - and finally in 1837 the Maori New Testament was printed – the first indigenous Bible in the southern

hemisphere. 5000 copies were distributed in the North Island. This changed everything... and the Bible was soon highly sought after among Maori.

Many became hungry to learn how to read and write their own language and when they did they heard about Ihu Karaiti, Jesus Christ and many became hungry not just for the new skill of literacy but hungry to know about this God of love and peace. One person even walked 250 miles to get a copy, saying 'One thing only do I desire; it is not a blanket, it is not anything that will pass away, but this is my great desire – the word of God.'

**What would be so precious to you that you would walk 250 miles for? Would you walk 250 miles to get a Bible?**

Colenso could not keep up with demand so the next run of 10 000 New Testaments in Te Reo was printed in England.

Jay Ruka has written: (slide9)

'...apprehending the word of God in their own language did from the inside out what years of a civilised mission could not... The years of preaching a civilised gospel did nothing compared to the story of God being directly placed in the hands of the people.' HCH 37-38

The transformation to the people of Aotearoa was massive.' HCH 37

Thousands of Maori were introduced to the God of the Bible. In the next ten years, from 1835 to 1845, 64 000 Maori were attending church services, out of an estimated population of 110 000 - so over half of the Maori population were engaging at some level with the Christian faith. This is what can happen when the word of God is put into the hands of people. The word of God is alive and active and it changes people.

We are going to look at a couple of stories that illustrate the power of the gospel here in NZ. But first we are going to pause and I am going to ask some of the children to come and hand out to each household or family group one of these small kete. A kete is simply a woven bag, but it can symbolise a container of knowledge or wisdom, prayers, a word from God... so it's not only a bag for physical things to go in but it symbolises anything that you receive or give to others. So as we continue with the service today, as you hold your kete, I want you to be thinking about what you and your family are going to take away from today's service in your kete. An idea, a thought, a question, a verse, a picture or a symbol... Paper and pens

The first is the story of a little girl named Tarore, who lived just over the Kaimais not far from Matamata, with her tribe Ngati Haua. The chief of this tribe was a fierce warrior named Waharoa who was involved in a long running and very bloody feud with neighbouring tribes. The missionaries Alfred and Charlotte Brown, who were later based at the Elms here in Tauranga, set up a mission in

the Matamata area in 1835. The work was hard and not many became Christians but one who did was a nephew of chief Waharoa - Ngakuku - and Ngakuku had a daughter called Tarore. (slide 10) She was 12, **do we have any 12 year olds here?** Ngakuku was given by the Browns a copy of the gospel of Luke, printed on Colenso's press, which he gave to Tarore and she kept in a kete around her neck for safe keeping. Maybe it looked a bit like the kete you have. It was a precious treasure.

The mission only survived for a year due to fierce fighting that broke out between nearby tribes. Ngakuku refused to take part in the fighting because of his Christian beliefs and when a violent raid swept through the area, Ngakuku, Tarore and others fled, heading for Tauranga and camping overnight at the foot of the Kaimais at Wairere falls. **Hands up if you have done the walk to the falls?** (slide 11) A group of us from this church did this walk a couple of years ago. This is a beautiful area but something very tragic happened there – after a meal and prayers, they settled down for the night but the light from their campfire had attracted the attention of a raiding party from Rotorua and just before daybreak they invaded the camp believing it was an enemy tribe. The noise of their ransacking and the barking of a dog alerted the party but in the race to escape Tarore was left behind. Everybody else escaped except for Tarore – and she was killed. The next morning Ngakuku found the body of his little girl. He gathered up her body and wept – his heart was broken... and it was then that he noticed that the kete around her neck was gone... the murderers had stolen his treasured gospel as well. (slide 12)

**Can you imagine how he would have felt? And I wonder if those with him were watching to see how he would react? Would he go back to the old ways of utu – pay back or revenge?**

Ngakuku amazed everyone including the Browns by declaring that he forgave her murderers. That night after evening prayers, Ngakuku stood before his people and quoted the words of Jesus from John 14:1 – do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.

The man who killed Tarore and stole her Bible was called Uita and when he returned to his village he met an ex-slave who was returning from captivity in Northland and was passing through on his way home to Otaki. Ripahau was his name and he had sought refuge in a mission station in Northland where he had learned to read and write. Uita asked him to explain the contents of the book he had stolen from Tarore because he couldn't understand it - and so Ripahau read to him from the gospel of Luke. Uita was touched by the message of peace and wanted to know more about this God. In fact he was so deeply moved that not long after, he sought out Ngakuku and asked for his forgiveness. Amazingly the two men – the grieving father and the murderer - were reconciled. The word of God is alive and active and it changes people.

The story does not end there. Ripahau continued on his way home to Otaki where he began to teach reading and writing to (slide 13) Katu te Rauparaha, the son of the greatly feared warrior chief Te Rauparaha and his cousin Matene te Whiwhi. They very quickly ran out of stuff to read so they were excited when a war party passed through bringing with them a bundle of stolen books... among them was a copy of the gospel of Luke... and it had Ngakuku's name written on it. It was looking a bit worse for wear with some pages missing but somehow Tarore's Bible had ended up in Otaki, once again in the hands of Ripahau. Once again he used it to practice his literacy by reading it to others. Katu and Matene also became convicted by the message of Ihu Karaiti and his peaceful ways, which strongly contrasted with the war like ways of their people. They asked Ripahau to take them to Kapiti Island to teach them how to read the Bible. This is what Katu who became known as Wiremu Tamihana Te Rauparaha wrote (slide14):

*We learnt every day and night. We did not lie down to sleep. We sat at night in the hut all round the fire in the middle. Whiwhi had part of the book and I part. Sometimes we went to sleep upon the book, then woke up and read again.*

They read the Bible for six months solid! Wow – I don't know about you, but these guys passion for the Bible puts me to shame! One source I read described this as New Zealand's first indigenous Bible college. After this six months, Katu and Matene travelled all the way from Otaki to the Bay of Islands to ask for a missionary to come and continue to teach them about God. They wouldn't take no for an answer and when they arrived back with Octavius Hadfield, he was amazed at how many Maori had already heard about God's love and forgiveness... the message of God's word had spread amongst them without a European missionary in sight! The word of God is alive and active and it changes people.

But how exactly did the Bible and Jesus change the lives of these two warriors with great mana and chiefly lineage?

Their lives were so dramatically changed by Jesus that they decided in 1842 to return to the South Island, where Katu's father Te Rauparaha has killed thousands of Ngai Tahu in raids. This time they went not to fight and kill but to share the gospel of Jesus with their enemies, to ask for forgiveness and to seek reconciliation.

**Would this have been an easy thing to do? What would they need to show?**

Katu tells the story (slide 15):

*After a time Matene and I decided to take the message to the Ngai Tahu. Te Rauparaha was very angry with us for going to the Ngai Tahu in Te Waipounanu (South Island) before he had obtained revenge... Soon all the Ngai Tahu there believed in the word of the true God of Heaven. The Ngai Tahu chiefs would keep*

*asking me: "Is your father planning to come here and kill us and take our lands?"  
I told them: "No, he will not come, for I have brought peace with the words of the  
gospel of the Lord."*

The word of God is alive and active and it changes people – and more than that, it can change a nation. In this period of NZs history the gospel of peace was spreading and old conflicts were being settled in a different way and even Te Rauparaha, the old battle hardened chief himself, ended his terrible raids to the South Island.

For those of you who are familiar with New Zealand history, you will know that what comes next is not pretty. Unfair land sales, The NZ land wars, land confiscations... it all damaged the progress of the gospel in NZ and Maori left the church in droves – and I cannot help but wonder what NZ would be like today if that had not been the case. But as we saw in the stories of Parihaka and the Battle of Gate Pa there were some Maori who stayed true to their newfound beliefs and in some instances displayed more Christlike qualities than the Europeans. This is true of Katu and Matene. Come and see me if you don't know much about this and would like to learn more... there are many great resources available for you.

But for today we are going to focus on the stories of the Williams brothers, William Colenso, Ngakuku, Taore, Katu and Matene... people who were changed by the word of God and its message of love, peace and forgiveness – and in turn changed those around them.

Taore kept her copy of Luke in a kete around her neck, because it was precious to her. I want to give you a few minutes before our final songs to think about the stories that you have heard today. What has God been saying to you as you have listened to this story from NZ's history? What are you going to take away with you in your kete when you leave here today?

Let us pray.

Final songs.