St Peter the Fisherman – Whitianga
June 19th 2022

Theme: Te Pouhere and Matariki

I runga i te ingoa o te papa, te tama, me te wairua tapu.

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

*Amen*

(Te Pouhere and Matariki slide)

We have an interesting juxtaposition of themes today – the Sunday where we acknowledge the reality of Anglican life here in Aotearoa New Zealand in our Constitution, Te Pouhere, and for the first time, the celebration of the culturally traditional Māori celebration of Matariki.

As I was considering how to comment and present these two important parts of our life, I was reminded of an extremely awkward moment I experienced during a dinner one night while on the recent cruise I took. The normal social chat was taking place, no in depth social or political issues raised, when somehow, and I can’t even remember how it came about, New Zealand Māori were mentioned. “Ah”, said a lady sitting opposite me, “they’re your natives aren’t they!” My friend Liz looked as though she wanted the ground to open up and swallow her. Her embarrassment was palpable, as the speaker was English, and until that moment we had generally thought, reasonably worldly-wise. The rest of the table members were equally silent as I think they realised by the stunned look on both Liz and my faces, that this probably was not a great dinner table moment.

My mind raced through a variety of responses – from harsh condemnation of such ignorant racism, to perhaps a less harsh, but still fairly blunt response around the fact that actually our current Governor-General is a Māori woman, a reasonably recent Anglican Arch Bishop of NZ (Sir Paul Reeves) was Māori, probably the greatest operatic soprano of the 20th Century, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, is Māori, one of our most successful Olympic athletes Lisa Carrington is Māori, the world famous film actor and director Taika Waititi is Māori, plus a whole heap of All Blacks, and the list could go on.

Actually I was so staggered at her comment, that the best I could manage was that in New Zealand we actually not only consider Māori and non-Māori as equal, we have a written Treaty which confirms that. I was, of course, aware that while our implementation of it falls short of perfect, we do certainly (mostly) try to meet its aims. I could have kicked myself later for not having the gumption to throw that race bomb straight back at her – but I guess I wouldn’t have achieved much except made the rest of the dinner uncomfortable. It was rather subdued anyway.

What I realise when reflecting on that moment, is that I now understand why our Anglican Synod predecessors worked so hard to get our Constitution Te Pouhere in place back in the 1990’s. It was by no means an easy or fully supported process. Among other things, it meant that assets previously held exclusively by the Pakeha strand of this new Constitution, by rights should be shared. Oops! That was likely to hurt. Rather like the Anglican church version of Treaty land settlements.

Secondly, many of we Pakeha do still carry covert attitudes that we are better than our Māori and Pacifica brethren, and life should be lived according to Pakeha norms. The old scratch the surface bit. If God was into scoring, what would each of us get as a mark out of 10, for truly living out the words of today’s sentence from Paul’s letter to the Galatians?

Remember?

***There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.***

Over those Synod debates, the members truly listening to God did succeed and not only do we have a legislative Treaty (Te Tiriti O Waitangi) that is finally getting close to being used to all New Zealanders’ advantage; the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand operates under a Constitution that genuinely grants equal partnership to all its constituents. How we actually ensure that happens, is still a work in progress, but faults and all, we are miles ahead of most other countries in the world in the ways we interact with our indigenous partners.

So, as part of that development and growth as a multicultural society, we now also finally give some official acknowledgement to a significant cultural component of Māori life.

Te Iwa O Matariki - The nine stars (or constellation) of Matariki.

(Video clip)

Māori tūpuna (ancestors) would look to Matariki for help with their harvesting. When Matariki disappeared in April/May, it was time to preserve crops for the winter season. When it re-appeared in June/July, tūpuna would read the stars to predict the upcoming season – clear and bright stars promised a warm and abundant winter while hazy stars warned of a bleak winter.

Because Māori follow the Māori lunar calendar, not the European calendar, the dates for Matariki change every year. Rather like Easter. Both herald a new start, new life.

Matariki itself is the star that signifies reflection, hope, our connection to the environment and the gathering of people. Matariki is also connected to the health and wellbeing of people. Given the issues and challenges of climate change, largely brought on by our own environmental misbehaviour and carelessness, being encouraged to turn back to a more natural, less invasive way of interacting with our environment, can’t be a bad thing. We still have much to learn from our Treaty and Te Pouhere partners.

Being willing to honour the Festival of Matariki, is part of our work in progress in relation to our bi-cultural heritage; especially acknowledging there is more than just our way of relating to our environment. While we should have both Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and Te Pouhere in our consciousness at all times, bringing them to the forefront of our worship even one day a year, is a good trigger for reflection on how we think about Paul’s message to one of his young Christian flocks all that time ago.

***There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.***

Amen.