

*Bishop Ross preached at St James Kerikeri on Sunday 6th June 2010.
The readings were Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 2 Corinthians 5: 14-19, and John 15: 9-17.*

Today is Te Pouhere Sunday, Constitution Sunday, the day on which we celebrate and reflect on the life of our Three Tikanga Church. The day is appropriately set following both Pentecost Day which we sometimes talk of as being the birth of the Church, and Trinity Sunday which speaks to us of the nature of God who exists as a complex community of persons.

One of the joys of coming to Kerikeri is being around the sites that are so historic to Aotearoa-New Zealand Anglican people. Oihi where Ruatara brought Marsden to preach to his people. The Kemp House and the Stone Store where missionary work was centred through the 1820s and 30s. And one of the things that I love about the Stone Store is being able to sit upstairs and glance through the transcripts of missionary journals from that period and get a feel for the struggles and successes of that period.

As we know, that phase of our church's history was essentially about a missionary Church, with CMS missionaries committed to a Maori Church through the establishment of the gospel among Maori people. It is what gave rise to the Maori name for the Anglican Church of Te Hahi Mihinare, the Missionary Church. But the signing of the Treaty, the arrival of Selwyn, and the growing numbers of European settlers in the middle decades of the 19th century had a dramatic impact on those early efforts. A missionary church quickly morphed into a settler church, and the work of CMS was gradually displaced by a branch of the Church of England as Anglicanism became more institutionally organised. So what had begun with the hope and intention of being an indigenous church had become a settler church into which Maori were invited to participate to a lesser or greater extent.

We have been struggling ever since about what that means for us as Anglicans. In 1857 Selwyn called the first General Synod of the Church which met at St Stephen's Chapel in Taurarua (Judge's Bay in Parnell). As a result on the 13th of June that year the first constitution of our church was signed, and if you ever visit that chapel you can see the inscription on the altar recording the event. It was a progressive document in its day. Selwyn had a vision for the place of laity in the church and so the constitution allowed for equal involvement of the three houses of laity, clergy and bishops in decision-making processes. It was unheard of in the Church of England at that time, and there were significant ripples in England as a result.

We have journeyed 153 years since then, and with those early tensions of indigenous and settler ministry always present to one extent or another. In 1928 the Church took the first effective step to address the issue with the appointment of Frederick Augustus Bennett as the first Maori Bishop and Bishop of Aotearoa. That office was held as suffragan alongside the Bishop of Waiapu. In 1978 a new measure of autonomy was given to that office and to Maori ministry through the formation of Te Pihopatanga o Aotearoa.

So the decision at the General Synod/te Hinota Whanui of 1992 to ratify a new constitution forming us into one church made up by Three Tikanga of Maori, Pakeha and Pasefika was not a sudden and dramatic change. We had been functioning somewhat like that for some time as the shape of the church had evolved, and so the new constitution gave new structure to what in many ways already was. The catchword at the time was (and still is) partnership – and the motivation is a genuine one – how can we as a church give effective shape to our desire to model partnership in the way in which our church is governed? How can we as a church organise ourselves to effectively fulfil our mission to an

ethnically diverse group of people within this part of the Pacific – the indigenous inhabitants of this land along with later settlers, and the people of the Islands of the Pacific – Fiji, Samoa, Tonga.

Some people said at the time “we are dividing – this is a form of apartheid”. Well the latter part of that statement is certainly not true, as the Three Tikanga of the church are *cultural* streams not racial ones. They give expression to cultural forms of worship and of leadership and organisation within the Church and thus contextualise the gospel. People are free to belong and to worship within whatever Tikanga they choose, and there are Pakeha who worship within Tikanga Maori, and Maori who worship within Tikanga Pakeha, and so also within and between Tikanga Pasefika.

But dividing? Well not structurally, but I do think that to a large extent we have gone our separate ways and lived our separate lives as a church. There has not been the exchange across Tikanga that had been hoped. And for much of the past 18 years we have been saying that for a time we have to establish our own life and identity within our Tikanga before we can engage more effectively with one another across Tikanga. For all that is and has been good about being Three Tikanga, I think this has inevitably taken time and energy from us and in some ways diverted the Church as a whole from its mission. I like to hope that this is changing.

I have been a member of General Synod since 2000 and have attended 6 ordinary sessions of the synod, as well as a special session to review this new constitutional life. There is a growing belief among many that it is time to move ahead again, confident in the trust that is emerging, especially between Tikanga Maori and Tikanga Pakeha in this country. Which is not to say that all is perfect among us and that some of the same tensions that exist in our wider society with regard to Maori & Pakeha will not still beset us. But we have achieved much.

So it is good to report that at the recent General Synod there was a strong sense of partnership in what we did. The General Synod is one of the places where we must relate to one another and to do so across decision making processes that affect us all together as Tikanga partners. We had some difficult conversations about resource sharing, about the future of Maori Anglican schools, and about the structure of St John’s College. I think that we spoke honestly and respectfully with one another and that there was a much greater awareness of partnership that is clearly emerging over the ten year period that I have been involved.

The Scriptures we have read today reinforce for us that love is the source and the goal of all things. It is the primary commandment given to Israel and it is the primary command given by Jesus to his disciples. Jesus taught that it is to be worked out in the love which they show for one another. There is one God whom they are to love. And as that one God loves all people, they are to reflect the love *of* God and their love *for* God by likewise loving others.

But we know that this is not always easy either in social life, or family life, or even in church life. We can struggle to work this out effectively in our relationships with one another, the diverse people that we are in all sorts of ways. The Corinthian Church is so instructive for us in this way. It was a Christian community with people gathered from across class structures, cultures, religious backgrounds, socio-economic differences. It was the kind of community which could bear witness to Paul’s great declaration to the Galatians about there being neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free, for all are one in Christ. Except that at Corinth it was horribly divided.

We have read today from the second letter. The first addresses some of those differences very directly. This second one has come about a year on, but it is clear that little has changed. Paul reminds them of

the mission to which they are called. God in Christ has reconciled us to himself and has entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation. Those who are reconciled to God, demonstrate that through reconciled human relationships. Paul writes that Christ died for all so that those who live should cease to live for themselves and should live instead for Christ. And for whom did Christ live? He lived for others. As the church we are constantly seeking to model how that is so in our relationships with one another. We seek to express it in the life we share as local communities of faith. Te Pouhere seeks to express it structurally for the life of our church as a whole. In doing so we can model the hope of reconciliation to a nation too often beset by the tensions of bi-cultural and multi-cultural living.

Paul again: Worldly standards have ceased to count in our estimate of anyone . . . for anyone united to Christ, there is a new creation.

And Jesus: I appointed you to go on and bear fruit, fruit that will last . . . This is my commandment – love one another.

Pray then that together we may be effective agents of the gospel of love, and in all of our relationships within the church and beyond it that we may be ministers of the reconciliation that we have found in Christ.