

Te Pouhere Sunday – YrA – 11 June 2023

Message – Joined Together

Source of All Being, Eternal Word, and Holy Spirit, one God in three persons, Unity and Trinity Divine, give us the vision to become a living symbol of the Trinity, woven and working together in unity. **Amen.**

Today we celebrate Te Pouhere, the constitution, of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, the official name for our part, province, of the Anglican church.

I was born in a country that has no such document and a church that has no such document. So, it seems odd to me that we celebrate the creation and adoption of a document.

Yet, in reality both the United Kingdom and the Church of England are constituted in particularly ways. That is, they are put together, formed, in a particular way. They just don't have it written in a single document. How they got to where they are is quite messy. It evolved over time, with many twists and turns, sometimes with great intentions and sometimes almost despite great intentions.

Here in Aotearoa New Zealand, our church and government are separate. The Anglican Church here started as a kind of offshoot of the Church of England but was essentially an independent province less than thirty years after the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The Anglican Church was an integral part of Māori life in many places. My Māori chaplaincy colleague, who is not

Anglican, still uses many of the prayers from the Māori translation of the book of common prayer, the official Church of England Prayer Book. The prayers were deeply embedded among Māori and one could say they have lasted longer within their culture than Pākehā culture, which I have to admit makes me stop and think.

Though there were many Māori in the Anglican church their voice was not heard. Their views were not represented. Their needs were not served. So, we sought a way of giving voice to the different Tikanga, practices, and traditions, of the different cultural groups with our Anglican Province.

We remain one church but we have different Tikanga, culture, and practices. How can we give expression to those different traditions and practices and still remain united as one? The idea of Te Pouhere emerged, it means constitution but it also means a mooring post. Here is one I made earlier!

Tikanga Māori, Tikanga Pacifica, and Tikanga Pākehā can be thought of as three separate waka, boats, in which we are travelling. The three waka could quite easily head off in their own directions so we needed something to keep us together.

We can, hopefully, all say that we are moored to God, our creator, through the incarnation, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. This can be said of all churches but it doesn't help us talk to one another and ensure that we remain in step with one another, on the same stroke, to continue with our boating analogy. So, we created the mooring post, te pouhere, to hold us all together, anchored in God but ensuring the we talk to one another and come to agreements together.

All of this got me thinking about what are the ropes that hold us to the mooring post and what kind of knots do we use.

For those who don't know, I like sailing but always seem to end up in places that are not conveniently placed for sailing. I am nonetheless an RYA day-skipper and I have sailed across the Atlantic on a tall ship. So, I like knots.

Would you like to name a few and consider how these might relate to our mooring post?

The reef knot (or square knot), of no use whatsoever in this situation. It is a knot that does not bind the ropes together. It is perfect in a storm when reefing a sail and then needing to reef the sail further but not good for binding. We as tikanga are far more firmly bound to te pouhere.

The thief knot!

The granny knot: granny's know what they are doing, with many types of fibre this will bind to itself. Your parcel from your granny is likely to arrive intact despite all that the post service do to it! But it is not all that much use for mooring us and, with modern synthetic ropes, it is not always binding!

Stopper knots: these work if there is an eye through which the rope just fits. The figure of eight or the double overhand are the most common. They work well on the boat itself but are not going to hold us to a mooring post.

Sheet bend and double sheet bend: these are two great knots for joining ropes of different sizes together. But that is not what we are aiming for. We are trying to join together as equals. We are trying to share a common mooring post that

keeps us together and from which there is no difference in treatment.

Carrick bend, well why not make both sides more secure!

Hunter's bend, the simplest knot for joining two uncooperative ropes together; some may feel that is a good description of the relationship between the tikanga but it is not a good model. We need to be taking responsibility for ourselves, not coerced into being together.

Not to be confused with the Zeppelin bend, which intentionally won't bind so that you can always undo the know even after it has been under extreme

Clove hitch, a simple mooring knot that holds under tension but can come loose when not under tension.

The bowline is a real mooring knot. But even this has its limitations. With synthetic ropes, it may not actually hold. With traditional ropes it is self-binding but with synthetic ropes it can pull apart. Sometimes hitches are added to the loose end but even these are not enough. What is it that will bind our churches together?

Bowline on a bight, this is a way of creating a loop in a continuous rope. If we are then holding both of the ends of the rope there is now way that this will let go of the mooring. Perhaps this is a good symbol of what we should be doing.

The hope of Te pouhere was that we would find a way to closer unity, real unity, not the kind where some voices are not heard. We are a work in progress. Quite a few people from our congregation have joined our local Māori

congregation, Hēmi Tapu, St James, today as a sign of our support and our wish for unity.

As the Māori missionary pointed out, our relationships with Māori extend all the way to Taumarunui, I feel slightly daunted but I also feel excited. Can we find a way to unity, in which we all feel heard and understood. In which the things that bind us hold us together hold fast in all weathers, in the good times and the bad.

Much like knots we need to think about the nature of the things that bind us. Are they appropriate? In the election of the new Archbishop of Polynesia, it was pointed out that there is an inconsistency in our rules. Pākehā have a veto over the appointment of the archbishops of the other tikanga but they do not have such a veto over our appointed archbishop.

We are certainly a work in progress but I am confident that we can, with continued good will on both sides show what is possible and how together we are stronger and together we can truly flourish, so that all may know fullness of life, as God has promised us. It will take some hard work, it needs us to walk with humility and to seek justice in love then will others see in us the light of Christ and the Unity of God. We are the body of Christ, let us make that a visible reality.

Jury mast knot, three loops interwoven, can look like a cross, almost certainly of no practical use but some things just look too good not to be mentioned!