

February 16<sup>th</sup> 2025 The Waikato Cathedral church of St Peter

THE HOLY INNOCENTS: Jeremiah 31:15-17; Psalm 8; I Corinthians 1:25-29; Matt.2:13-18

**He aha te mea nui o te ao?**

**He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!**

What is the most important thing in the world?

It is people! It is people! It is people!

This is a difficult Gospel and some of what I say may be difficult to hear – let us pray

Hold us blessed Trinity in your perfect love .....**silence**

May we hear your voice and know ourselves to be safe in your presence. AMEN

The Holy Family flees to an uncertain future far away. Palestine is under Roman occupation when Herod – one ruthless man – orders the killing of the little local boys, children whom the church has considered martyrs to this day – hence the use of the liturgical colour red.

The innocent of every age continue to be the victims of war and violence. I'm going to remind us of just a few and then we'll have some silence– to allow ourselves space to be with God.

- \* Auschwitz
- \* Aramoana
- \* Dunblane in Scotland 1996 – 16 5 year olds and their teacher are shot dead by a lone gunman in their school gymnasium
- \* Christchurch – in 2019 ... 51 people in their mosques die at the hands of one terrorist whom we do not name –
- \* Gaza –October 2023 ... too many to count, destruction beyond comprehension ... Palestine pummeled to dust

Let us pause in the safe silence of God.

So much evil, so much loss, so much pain.

It's understandable if we wonder where God is in all of this –

Two people who have grappled with this question have this to say.

In his book 'Night', Elie Weisel wrote of witnessing a young boy being hanged, in Auschwitz. His body was so light that he struggled between life and death for more than half an hour. Prisoners were forced to watch

“Where is God? Where is He?” someone behind me asked. ...

And I heard a voice within me answer him:

“Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows.

Revd Colin McIntosh who took the memorial service at Dunblane Cathedral referred to the first reading we had this morning – ‘Rachel weeping for her children because they were no more – and then he said:

‘Even adults don't understand .... Our only comfort lies in the knowing that it was not the will of God that our children should die; that in those fatal, frightening moments in the school gymnasium, God's was the first of all our hearts to break.’

This takes us to the centre of our faith – who is the God we worship?

Do we worship a remote, disinterested God?

A God who is vindictive, a casual killer?

NO – God chose to become a loving presence **with** us and **within** us, through tragedy and pain. Jesus set aside his divinity and met his death as we do; his cross shows us the extent of God's love and the path to resurrection.

God was in the Christchurch worshippers who suffered and died, in the first responders trying to save them; God was in the strangers who gave shelter to those fleeing the gunfire, in the two police who brought the terrorist's rampage to an end.

God was in every single act of compassion and fellow feeling expressed through the floral tributes and messages left near the Mosques and in a 'sea of sorrow' at the Botanic Gardens.

God chooses to exercise power through LOVE and we are agents of that love, as St Teresa of Avila says:

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which Christ looks  
Compassion on this world ...

Let's bring this back to our time and place :

- \* As the clock counted down the end of 2024 and the start of 2025 a little child was killed in Fairfield, Hamilton

How easy it is to make assumptions.

How easy it is to ignore our capacity for violence – harm is done not only by physical or sexual aggression but by things like sarcasm and bullying, exclusion from family gatherings, and by lack of self-care.

I've been in a place where I was close to hurting someone I loved – maybe some of you have too.

Through the grace of God, I was helped back from the brink. Over time I moved into a healthier space but I'll never forget that the potential lies within, the outcome could have been so very different.

Events like this make us look at ourselves, to take the log out of our own eye before we try to take the speck out of our neighbour's eye

[ Matthew 7: 3-5.]

When we face in ourselves the things we don't want others to know, then we can be honest with God about these things as well. I am learning to stop and look within where God's spirit and my spirit meet. As we open ourselves to God so we begin to see others with more compassion, more empathy, and more humility. The barrier between 'us' and 'them' begins to dissolve: Love your neighbour as you love yourself becomes real.

The liturgical colour red not only reminds us of the blood shed by martyrs –red flames through our liturgies in the season of PENTECOST – the coming of the HOLY SPIRIT TO THE CHURCH

Just as one person can – dreadfully - take lives, so one person can act to save life, to start a local environmental campaign, to care for a threatened colony of Royal Albatross or make bike helmets mandatory ... the list is endless.

And so we trust that as we pray and pay attention to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, to the God-hunches, we'll know what is ours to do:

We may be led to:

- Make contact with a young neighbour with children and no obvious support system
- Pray for someone who keeps coming to our mind
- Share our gardening experience with others
- Sponsor a child or a family through a trustworthy aid agency here or abroad
- Become better informed and maybe even politically active through agencies such as Amnesty International or Avaaz

We know that when God invites us to do something then we will also be equipped even if might seem outside our comfort zone ...

Few of us would find ourselves in the position of the American Episcopalian Bishop Mariann Budde who preached at Washington National Cathedral following President Trump's Inauguration.

'The leader of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, she had planned for months to preach on three elements of unity — dignity, honesty and humility... [but some] hours before the service she felt called to add a fourth element to her sermon: A plea for mercy, on behalf of everyone who is scared by the ways he has threatened to wield his power.'<sup>1</sup>

Ridicule and death threats followed but she had been guided by the Spirit to speak truth to power, to speak for those who have no voice.

May we have the courage to do what God calls us to do.

May we trust God's grace as we step into the unknown.

He aha te mea nui o te ao?

He aroha, he aroha, he aroha.

AMEN

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/22/us/trump-bishop-plea.html> accessed 14.2.25