

Te Pouhere Sunday – 2 June 2024

Message – Images for our voyage together

Creator, Redeemer, and Giver of Life, revealed to us through mystery and spiritual insight, open our hearts and minds, ears and eyes, to your love and grace. **Amen.**

Well, having avoided preaching on the Trinity, we come immediately to a second Aotearoa New Zealand preacher's occasion to be avoided. There is some commonality between the two occasions.

Both are about relationship. The doctrine and mystery of the Trinity is about our belief that God is relational. God was relational before the universe existed, a matter beyond our comprehension. To speak of relationship requires some kind of differentiation. The best we can do is to think of this in terms of the persons of God.

One God in three coequal, coeternal, consubstantial persons. For those feeling this is impossible to believe, I think you can relax. Though a doctrine of our church, we also hold we only have to believe those things proven from scripture and if you were attentive to last week's readings, you will notice that the scriptural evidence is slim.

The Trinity was not a doctrine of the Church at the time the New Testament was written. Nonetheless, it is worth considering why it is considered orthodox doctrine. It is a way of perceiving what it means to say that God is love.

Te Pouhere Sunday, celebrating the constitution of our church is also about relationship. Our constitution is trying

to give expression to the nature of the relationship between the three different parts of one church. Like the Trinity, we are supposed to be equal partners. Paul tells us, *‘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.’* (Gal 3.28)

In the Church there is unity without needing uniformity. We remain different and yet united, coequal, cotemporal, and consubstantial. We are all equally beloved children of the creator God, equally made in the image of God, equally in need of God’s grace, love, and guidance.

Sadly, the constitution does not fully express this equality and the tikanga are treated unequally. We are flawed, a work in progress. Our spiritual journey is to learn how to give expression to our unity, to learn to love and support one another and to enrich one another’s lives.

We can only really talk of the trinity through the medium of images. We are, quite incredibly, called to be an image of the Trinity, an image of the relational God, as a local congregation, as three tikanga in the church, as churches in this land. In this we very certainly know we are a work in progress. There are many ways in which we are certainly nothing like the image of the God who is love.

We must always tread carefully when using images and figurative language. We must ensure we do not push the image beyond its connection with what we are trying to describe. I have yet to find useful figurative language about the Trinity. In fact, some of the images that preachers use are heretical. And, when theologians venture into the world

of quantum mechanics, I start to despair. Many of the predictions of quantum mechanics seem improbable and yet turn out to be true. For me that is about the limit of the usefulness of quantum mechanics in describing the Trinity. Both seem contrary to our human perception of the universe; yet in neither case does it mean they are not true!

I do find something powerful in the icon of the Trinity, a version of which was on last week's service sheet and another version on last year's Trinity service sheet. Perhaps an icon's physical nature, its obvious symbolism, its imperfections, and limitations, all remind us it is only an image, which we may find helpful. We may gaze on it in wonder and allow it to speak to us. Words or creation may also be useful places of wonder, where we can, if we seek, come closer to God.

For the last few years, I have valiantly tried to grapple with the image of Te Pouhere, the mooring post. This year, I will admit that I don't find it a helpful image. I love boats and sailing. The power of the sea, the possibility of being able to see no one else for a thousand square miles, the approximate area one can see from the top of a tall ship mast, in a world we think of as overpopulated. Yes, I really did calculate the area after climbing mast of SV Tenacious while bobbing across the Atlantic. All of this is awe inspiring. The image of a mooring post is not, at least to me.

One of the problems I have with the image is that the church and the world within which it exists are not static. The mooring post suggests we have found land and a place to stay. Yet, we are not at home in the world. We are passing through. We are on a voyage of discovery not at the

end of a journey. Surely, we need to reimagine what we are talking about. Our constitution holds us together but we must ask in what way. It cannot tie us to one place, it has to be something with which we voyage together.

Does our constitution help us on the voyage made in the company of two other vessels. The answer is probably that it is *'good in parts'*. We should be working on what tools would help us in our endeavour to voyage together on the wild oceans of the world of the diverse societies of today that find themselves blown about by the winds of technology, humanities actions, the changing shape of a world that is becoming a global village where all are interconnected in inescapable and ever more immediate ways.

The imagery of being a flotilla of separate vessels on the open ocean is very different. It is neither practical nor safe to be tightly held together in the open ocean. The power of the element can throw boats around in ways that are unpredictable. The most that can safely be done is to run lines between vessels and that is difficult and perilous but here I am probably pushing the imagery too far.

Nonetheless, as a flotilla we recognise we move independently and so we need to find ways to ensure that we can communicate our intentions clearly. At sea there are rules that govern how we should communicate and even who has right of way. Our constitution provides some of channels of communication and some rules.

How do we ensure that there is clear and ongoing communication between our three tikanga. Ongoing communication requires active effort from all sides. We

need to be actively giving and receiving information. Both are equally important. And, it needs to happen at all levels, between all tikanga. We need to recognise those who may be of a different tikanga within our own community. We need to be in communication with Hemi Tapu, which happens in a modest way through our Friday communion.

Our diocese needs to be talking to and working with the Māori dioceses of our area and the conversations and work need to continue nationally. Perhaps we can envisage ourselves as a combined fleet of ships. Each of us sailing our own vessel combining as a church and learning to sail alongside others.

You may have spotted by now that I love the imagery of sailing. There are different images that speak to each and every one of us. We learn from reflecting on these images, whether they are a part of creation or human creation.

For me life cannot be separated into tapu and noa. The activity of sailing may be a part of ordinary life but we are called to see the sacred in all things. God is in all things, God created all things, our task is to see God in all things.

I invite you this week, to reflect on what speaks to you of the wonder of God, of creation, of our life together, as servants of the servant God.

We will all see God in different places and different ways, may we have the grace to hear and learn from one another's insights, vision, and glimpses of the God who is beyond our comprehension. And, in so doing be united in our voyage together and in the love of God, creator,

redeemer, and giver of life. Amen. Amen.