

Renewing God

Readings: Gen 8:13 – 22, Luke 4:16 – 22a

Last Christmas we celebrated the bi-centenary of the first service Christmas Day Samuel Marsden was invited by Ngā Puhi chief Ruatara to come to Aotearoa to preach the Gospel. The Church Mission Society became established in New Zealand but initially had little success in winning Maori to Christ.

Keith Newman, in his book *Bible and Treaty* describes that changing as, “the Christian message spread like wildfire in dry bush”. The Gospel spread mostly because Maori shared the Good News among themselves. One indigenous missionary was Ngati Rarawa chief Nopera Panakareao who did mission trips to the local villages. He told the people how good it was to be a Christian and invited them to join the faith, which they did in droves.

But the church became less missional and adopted a more pastoral role as the Pakeha arrived. The settlers wanted the churches to meet their needs rather than to reach out to Maori.

Recently, with some fellow school chaplains, the topic of why the church exists came up. Frustration was expressed as some saw our churches as inward focused; too concerned with buildings, church politics, and tending to our own needs.

Do we need our renewing God to renew our zeal for the outsider?

God’s plan has always been to draw everyone and everything together in him. Working our way through Genesis, we have seen God consistently bringing growth and renewal. (By the way we are only going to cover up to Genesis 12 in this series.)

Let’s have a look at how God and Noah’s relationship is being renewed:

Last time I spoke about the flood we saw just how horrific it was and how gutted God was about the whole thing. Now dry land is emerging.

Nothing is said about how God feels but, I imagine much joy as he says to Noah, “Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives.”

The horror of the flood is over and the Lord emphasises fruitfulness once again. “Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it.” We are reminded that the earth was created for fullness, for enjoyment, for goodness and much life.

What Noah and his family’s feelings? Perhaps they were all had cabin fever, after about a year in the ark¹, and couldn’t wait to get out - excited about what they might find in this renewed world? Maybe they were worried about leaving. No matter how cramped and

¹ Noah entered the ark in the 600th year of his life, on the 17th day of the 2nd month (Genesis 7:11-13). Noah left the ark on the 27th day of the 2nd month of the following year (Genesis 8:14-15). assuming a lunar calendar of 360 days, Noah was on the ark for approximately 370 days.
Source: www.gotquestions.org/Noahs-ark-questions.html

smelly the ark was, it was familiar. Perhaps they had gotten too comfortable? However they felt, Noah and his family, and the creatures were all obedient to God and came out.

And one of the early things they did was to give thanks to God, to worship him for preserving their lives and to recommit themselves to him.

Verse 20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, ... sacrificed burnt offerings on it.

And the Lord, responsive as ever, smelled the pleasing aroma – the Lord knew the intention of Noah’s heart was good. Sacrifice is about worship and prayer and offering to God. Noah built an altar so he could do it right. As an aside, people sometimes say Anglicans are too formal – “Why don’t we just go with the Spirit?” There is a place for organised worship as Noah demonstrates.

God’s response to Noah’s worship was one of grace. God knew that humans would stuff up again. God said “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though/for/because every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. “

Human nature wouldn’t change. Neither would God’s nature. God is always about forgiving and renewing. The word joining the two phrases in this sentence is translated in all kinds of ways, but the word really means “because.” It is because we are so corrupted that God creates and recreates order and new life in our world and in our lives. Because humanity is sinful we need God’s grace and renewal again and again. In chapter 9 when God renews his covenant with Noah he reveals the promise of the rainbow. Forever more will the rainbow be a sign of God’s promise of faithfulness and renewal. As Christians we know that renewal comes through Jesus Christ.

Could there be any greater sign of renewal and hope than Jesus quoting Isaiah as he declares his mission to the world?

God’s Spirit is on me;
he’s chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor,
Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and
recovery of sight to the blind,
To set the burdened and battered free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour!”

I was really heartened this last week by our church’s response to Peter – a man who had been sleeping rough in our porch. When he came to Trinity Sunday breakfast, many people were so friendly, urging him to eat well and to take food away with him afterwards. One couple took him home for the worst nights of heavy rain.

On Wednesday, when I signed some documents for him, he was a different Peter from the man I saw on Sunday. Sunday he was despondent and difficult to communicate with. Wednesday he called me by name and looked into my eyes. No more mumbling; he spoke clearly. He had taken steps to move forward. Everything isn’t sorted for Peter. But Peter now has hope, given by God, through this couple who took him in. They wished they could have done more. I wished I could have too. However they did what they could and the Lord has brought some renewal in Peter’s life. Please pray he will bring more - pray for work and a more permanent place to stay.

Surely one of the key purposes of the Church is to act as God's agents of renewal in the world. We must bring good news about salvation from sin, freedom from poverty and death in all its forms.

You might recall our Anglican marks of mission:

- To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom;
- To teach, baptise and nurture the new believers;
- To respond to human needs by loving service;
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation;
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

They do bear some resemblance to Jesus' mission don't they? Jesus points out that God the Father, has chosen him, the Son, to preach, release and heal.

In turn, Jesus chooses us to do the same.

The danger for the church generally is that we too easily become a settler church rather than a missional one. We know we live in a challenging environment. Life is complex; uncertainty abounds and rapid change is the norm. We need to focus on Christ and make critical adjustments to be a viable presence in our neighbourhoods.

At 2011 Synod Bishop Richard commented on Peter Lineham's analysis of 2006 census statistics:

"In the areas where the missional church had been strong - in the more traditional Maori, settlements such as Wairoa and Gisborne, the percentage of the population defining themselves as Christian was still relatively high: 72% in Wairoa and 67% in Gisborne.

Conversely, in those places where the settler church had become established, the percentage of the population calling themselves Christian was markedly lower: 47% in Tasman and 46% in Nelson - the lowest in New Zealand" at that time.²

Our Bishop went on to point out that we spend much time maintaining the structure of the church. So much so that we find it very hard to focus on Jesus' mission – that of bringing renewal to the world.

Becoming a three Tikanga church was in large part, a response by our Anglican province, to the lack of resources Maori had, to be missional to their own people.

In 1978 Te Pihopatanga o Aotearoa was inaugurated as a semi-autonomous body with representation in the General Synod. In 1992 the General Synod adopted a revised constitution, which provides an opportunity for each of the three partners to

² <http://www.nelsonanglican.org.nz/sites/default/files/Synod%20Address%202011.pdf>

talk as an equal partner at General Synod and to exercise mission and ministry to God's people within the culture of each partner.³

You might think all of this is irrelevant. It is debatable whether or not this achieved what the church had hoped it would. Nevertheless it was all done from motives of justice in order that each member of the church could function as God's partner in renewal in their own cultural context. There is actually much strength in our Anglican ways of being.

More important than our denominational picture and ways of being, is the mandate that Jesus gives us as Christians and members of Church on the Hill here and now.

Now we too are called to partner with God in bringing renewal to his people and his creation: spiritual renewal, physical, emotional and mental renewal.

What might that look like for us? It's not completely foreign territory as we have been moving in the missional direction for a while now. We are actually partnering with God in some important ways – not least in putting our money on the line for the new building which we see as an important tool for the renewal of this community.

Messy Church is another way we are working towards renewal. Families today are under a great deal of pressure and Messy Church is one of the best ways we can reach them with the gospel. Youth group, etc etc

You might like to use the reflection questions to help you think and pray about what God is saying to you through this sermon:

What aspects of the Lord's renewal do you most need?

Who would you most like to see set free as they enjoy the Lord's favour?

What aspects of his renewal can you recognise and celebrate?

³ <http://www.anglican.org.nz/About/History>