

St Andrew's on The Terrace Sunday 29 April 2018 Easter 5. Anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in Wellington Harbour, Port Nicholson

Readings for the Gathering

Genesis 17:1-7, 9-10a

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, God appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you." Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep.

Contemporary reading

Te Wharepouri

read by Tuparahuia Pita

Te Wharepouri, a local rangatira who signed both the Deed of Sale for the Port Nicholson Block and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, when later asked was reputed to have said to Colonial Wakefield.

"... I thought you were telling lies, and that you had not so many followers. I thought you would have nine or ten, or perhaps as many as there are at Te Awaiti [a whaling station at the head of the Marlborough Sounds]. I thought that I could get one placed at each Pa, as a white man to barter with the people and keep us well supplied with arms and clothing; and that I should be able to keep these white men under my hand and regulate their trade myself."

Despite this Te Wharepouri carried his hopes for unity to his death bed and it is said his dying message was; "I muri nei kia pai ki aku taonga Maori, taonga Pakeha, kia tae ake te haruru o to reo ki ahau i Te Reinga" "After my departure, let the future of Māori and Pākeha be positive, that word of it will resonate with me in Te Reinga"

Reflection for the Gathering

When is a covenant a covenant and when is it a breach of trust? When is a covenant a covenant and when is it colonisation? How can we do covenant God style? The models in scripture which Christians have for covenant are those struck between the Almighty God and humankind. They are, of course reported by humankind, as the voice of God is notoriously hard to hear!

Yet, the humans writing down the ongoing story of the successive covenants through which the Jewish people travelled, are remarkably honest about failures on the human side. A picture is painted, through the centuries, of God (the Almighty One) consistently resetting terms of covenants which have been broken by humankind (the non-almighty ones!). Not because God had reneged on the terms of the original agreements, but because again and again human beings had wandered away from their obligations.

In the rest of the 17th chapter of Genesis, part of which was read today, the human part of the deal was to be circumcised, which in general the Jewish race has followed since. Later in Exodus, another covenant is struck where God declares unwavering allegiance to the people. In exchange it is asked that 10 commandments be honoured – I think you know the ones I am referring to. Four of them are about the relationship between humans and the divine. The other six cover human-to-human relationships. Perhaps these last six are the most relevant when we consider the Treaty as covenant. You know them... they enjoin us to honour our parents, to preserve life by not murdering each other, to be faithful, to be honest and... perhaps the last is most relevant to the Treaty: "You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour." Houses, wives, servants, oxen,

asses are mentioned, but they all exist on **land**. This commandment could have been summarised “thou shalt not covet anything of your neighbour’s land and anything on that land.”

Treaties and covenants are often put in place to hold back our covetousness – that human characteristic which always assumes the grass is greener on the other side of our neighbour’s fence and often results in us climbing over that fence into our neighbour’s territory.

It is reported in official histories that one of the inducements for Maori to sign the Treaty was that under the Treaty, there would be control over settlers as everyone was brought under the authority of the Crown. Settlers to New Zealand in 1840, both domestic and official, needed to remember the example they would have known well from the Christian scriptures, that even Almighty God ‘stuck’ on God’s side of the Covenant. Even God Almighty kept the covenant. From 1840 on, all the power of the British Empire needed to be employed in faithfulness to promises made. We had the example of the all-powerful God obeying the rules, the all-powerful British Empire needed to do the same. Imperial power needed to be applied to consistently faithful dealings. Imperial powers needed to pay respect to the mana of the covenant partner. If God Almighty – so much more regarded as Almighty in the nineteenth century – if that God had shown how to be faithful to covenants, how much more should human beings?

In the moment we all tend to forget how significant are the times in which we live. In preparation for today, Honiana found excerpts from a diary of one of the settler’s wives, one Hannah Butler. There is a bewildering array of events recorded for January 1841 - from the poignant to the frivolous - with the usual scratchiness of new neighbours working out how to get along. These daily occurrences, just a year after the signing 178 years ago today, were the first building blocks of attitudes and prejudices and actions which would later result in how Treaty principles worked out in real life.

Jan 14 disturbance due to a settler’s pig getting into Maori gardens

Jan 15 the dispute is adjudicated in Wellington

Jan 16 a child is drowned in the Hutt River

Jan 19 a settler, Mr Todd dies

Jan 21 a dispute over a rope being taken and recovered

Jan 21 Mrs Butler and others walked to Wellington from Petone to attend a ball celebrating the first year of the settlement. “had a splendid attendance and were much amused. The ball broke up at five thirty on Saturday morning”

Jan 23 boat race and hurdle race, the Petone boat won

Jan 24 a four month old child is buried

Jan 27 dispute about settler’s pigs again destroying Maori gardens. This time the pig is named as belonging to Mr Mcfarlane. “Tuarau came to say he and caught a pig belonging to Mr Mcfarlane. He claimed damages; Mr Macfarlane said he would pay by and by at which the native seemed much grieved.” (I should think so!)

Jan 28 a large, confusing dispute over land claims begins as an Englishman appears

claiming to own Port Nicholson.¹

We get on with the ups and downs of daily life and can forget that every moment we are partners to the covenants and treaties in which we are engaged.

Amongst us as a faith community here we have covenants and treaties into which we have entered. Throughout New Zealand we are all, descendants of settlers and later tau iwi, partners in the Treaty. Let us ‘do Treaty’ God style, never walking away, but remaining firm and fair.

Each year we commemorate the signing, whether in February or April, it reminds us we walk on holy ground.

Let us live out the awe and reverence which the land and each of us deserve.

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¹ <http://www.enzb.auckland.ac.nz/docs/Barton/pdf/bart1012.pdf>