**St Andrew’s on the Terrace (179th anniversary 22 Feb) Sunday 24 February 2019 Epiphany 7 Readings for the Gathering**

**Gospel Luke 6:31-38**  **Love for Enemies**

**31**Do to others as you would have them do to you. **32**“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. **33**And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. **34**And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full.**35**But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, who is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. **36**Be merciful…. **Judging Others 37**“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. **38**Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

**Contemporary reading** from **The Rev John Mcfarlane:** paper presented to Iwi Christianity: Tauiwi Conference, Waitangi 27-29 November 2012, p. 24.by Rev Wayne te Kaawa

The differences in language, appearance, custom and traditions were barriers that he [Rev John Mcfarlane] readily accepted and worked through. He did not offer criticism of the strange ways and custom of the people of the land instead he strove to understand their unique place in this part of the world and how they interacted with the new world that was emerging around them. The only criticisms that he publicised were against the vices and negative effects of colonisation by the Church, Society and State and how it seriously marginalised the people of the land limiting their potential. On the issue of colonisation he became an outspoken advocate of social justice for the welfare and advancement of Maori even to the point of withstanding criticism publicly and privately from his own people… In a humble grave in the parish of Lochigilphead, in Inverary, Argyllshire, Scotland, lie interred the remains of Rev John Mcfarlane. If there ever was a case for a patron saint of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand the Rev John Mcfarlane would qualify at the top of the list of possible candidates.

**Reflection for the Gathering**

I wonder how we would have got on with John Mcfarlane? He would have approved of our waiata practice after the Gathering today. He was ahead of his time with bicultural issues. Would he be ahead of his time on rainbow issues were he here today? From this excerpt from Wayne te Kaawa’s paper, which he gifted to us a couple of years ago, Mcfarlane seems like a founder of which this church can still be proud. Wayne goes so far to nominate him for patron saint of Aotearoa! Would he get the position when lined up with others who might be nominated – Susanna Aubert, James K Baxter, Sir Paul Reeves, the Very Rev John Murray? You will have your own lists of those you think married spirituality and a groundedness in this land. Birthdays do mean that we look back – sometimes in delight, occasionally in anger, sometimes with regret, other times with contentment. But we do that a lot. Only the other day I found myself going over the old ground of what we were forbidden to do on Sundays. That’s old stuff, old regrets, old territory. Who and what are we now and who or what will the church be in the future because of what we are doing now?

**Church now and in the future**. One structure which intrigues me as a way to do church now is that of the Church of the Saviour in Washington DC. I have spoken of them before. Roger and I visited it in 2013. Having followed a rule of not allowing their church communities to get beyond a certain number they now call themselves *The “Scattered Community” of Churches.* This is how they describe it: *The current structure of The Church of the Saviour is a “scattered community” of small independent churches. Having come from a common family history and vision, the churches and other affiliated communities share similar, but not identical, practices and commitments. Each is a unique local expression of the Body of Christ. The churches welcome your participation in their worship services, classes and other gatherings.* They go on to describe the way these scattered churches work; ***Some Common Themes Among the Scattered Churches*** *Comprised of ordinary people making extraordinary commitments, the churches in the tradition of The Church of the Saviour are structured to nurture intentional relationships and practices to support the journey of faith in Christ. Each church calls for an “integrity of membership” in the spirit and tradition of the original Church of the Saviour. This means being accountable to one another in small circles called mission groups that make commitments to study and pray, give and serve at a particular point of need. Members take classes in the church’s School of Christian Living or the*[*Servant Leadership School*](http://slschool.org/)*, as well as join in the community’s ongoing life of worship, celebration and service. Formation for an intern member might last from one to three years. Annually, after a period of discernment, members renew—or withdraw—their covenant membership. “Integrity of membership” invites members to discern each year whether or not they still are called to this way of journeying with Jesus and his friends.* Some of you know that the mission groups mentioned here have over several decades now spawned 40 not-for-profit organisations which work for social welfare and social justice. [[1]](#footnote-1)

The church of the Saviour has very intelligent and forward-thinking people in it. No way could they be described as fundamentalist, but they demand from their members, a combination of heart and mind and hands. They think theological and politically. I’ve told you that one of their favourite stories is that one Sunday morning in church they announced that one of their members had been arrested again for protesting in front of the White House. The congregation applauded. That woman had purchased her own orange jumpsuit for her frequent trips to prison – I think she was in her 60s or 70s. Church members are also unashamedly committed in their hearts. Their website is structured around the title of a book written by one of the founding members – Inward Outward – heart and action. Finally, the church’s structure calls for every member to each year to again be sure they belong fully to the community which means they will get their hands dirty in some kind of mission group. Heart and Mind and Hands. Inward Journey Outward Journey. <http://inwardoutward.org/>

When I look back at this 179th birthday of St Andrew’s on the Terrace, and check whether churches I ministered in are fit for the future which will be demanded of them, I wonder if I did congregations a service. Over the years I have tended to give permission for people to be equivocal about how they believed and how they thought and how they acted – how their hearts, mind and hands were engaged or not engaged. Now, I think liberal and progressive Christians are embarrassed to be Christian in this NZ society of ours which is so definitively secular. Now, I think many are in danger of giving up on being connected and committed to unpopular ways of thinking. It has become so important to accept everyone that we are not as prepared to say “but I disagree with you on that issue.” We have not learned how to have those difficult conversations where we manage to disagree and yet remain in a loving relationships with our opponent. Part of the Church of the Saviour is their Servant Leadership School – this is how they describe it: *For two decades now, the Servant Leadership School has been a catalyst for Christian discipleship, theological reflection and social activism.* ***The School maintains the belief that individual and community transformation begins with spiritual formation and personal commitment.*** *True to its original mission, the Servant Leadership School remains a place where people of various backgrounds, interests and life journeys can be equipped to be servant leaders in ways that support justice and community.  Our offerings include classes, events and workshops around topics ranging from servant leadership to social analysis, centering prayer to engaging the powers, and anti-racism to addictions recovery.* Did you notice? ***“The School maintains the belief that individual and community transformation begins with spiritual formation and personal commitment.”*** This leads me to ask whether what we are doing now here at St Andrew’s on the Terrace is dealing in enough “spiritual formation and personal commitment” in order that we will now and in the future be seeing “individual and community transformation”? This shows in our membership statistics. If we cannot commit to joining this or any other church how can we transform it?

Looking around the world and the church right now, I can see that if we do not attend to our core business, it will be lost from society, because it is no oneelse’s core business. What is that core business? Spiritual formation. Now that’s a funny thing to be saying to post-Enlightenment, progressive people! Spiritual formation is something nuns and brothers did in monasteries. It is sometimes what is done by ordinands training for ministry. (not enough of the time in my opinion but that’s another thesis which we don’t have time for now). It is for those wishy-washy spirituality type people. Anyway, submitting to a routine or discipline isn’t really hip just now. When would a postmodern guy or gal fit a spiritual routine into their already filled-up lives? And if we are retired – well we’ve done enough of that in the past, thank you very much! So, we might turn to social justice as an antidote to this yawning gap that our post enlightenment thinking has created, this black hole where faith used to be, this abyss where we used to trust we could get to the other side. But the Church of the Saviour knows that sustainability working for social justice, is undergirded by spiritual fitness and health. You don’t get arrested all those times, so often you need your own orange jumpsuit, unless a spiritual life gives the mainspring for that action.

I have just started going to the gym. I am a gym bunny now! (sort of). At first it was scary, then challenging and enjoyable trying new things each week. Now we’ve reached a fairly routine stage. It’s not quite as exciting, not quite so new. I find myself debating about whether I can really fit the gym in today, or whether I might just use a lower level on the machines…. You know the feeling. I can please myself about how little or how much I do at the gym, but, only doing what I need to do, and regularly, will keep me fit. I can be dismissive of the regular spiritual routines which I was encouraged into as a child and young adult. I can kid myself that I am too sophisticated to bother with that now and anyway I’m no longer into guilt, am I? But like a body which has not been exercised enough, a person who lacks commitment to spiritual practice, ends up spiritually unfit. I know. It’s happened to me many times. And when that happens my outer work for the church or for justice within society starts to stutter and fail. It’s a crucial time for the church in general and St Andrew’s in particular. We can judge other branches of the church and pity their passion for the spiritual. But, the kind of socially-just effort called for in the first part of the Gospel reading – giving without expectation or reward, loving those who do not love back - is not sustainable unless we are also maintaining a spiritual routine of some sort.

Yes, it will be different from when we were children or young people and we will need to work on how it might be different. A Rhythm of Life group last year met at a couple of times and then, well, it was like we didn’t want to go to the gym anymore! Centering Prayer these days never gets above 5 people and is usually about 3. If you can’t get here at 12.30 on a Tuesday you could stop where-ever you are at 12.30pm and take 20-30 minutes knowing others are doing the same elsewhere. If you need help in knowing what to do, ask. It would be good to work together on a book or prayers and quotations for reading a different times of the day – anyone interested? A good structural move here at St Andrew’s which is in the early stages of development is a Mission and Ministry workgroup which will partner the Finance and Facilities Management Group so that we have *two* major committees – one for property and finance and one for the spiritual aspects of our life. They will work together to re-create an integration which has fallen by the wayside with all the great effort which has been put into (and will continue to be put) into Saving St Andrew’s. Perhaps we need to save St Andrew’s in a more conventional sense – saving ourselves from sliding into a fully secular way of being which ignores our foundational commitments and virtues; engages our heads, but leaves behind our hearts and our hands? Have we been pursuing an Outward Journey without an accompanying Inward Journey? Could we, like The Church of the Saviour, “*nurture intentional relationships and practices to support the journey of faith in Christ.”* Lent is not far away – it begins on Ash Wednesday, March 6, just 12 days. You could use those 12 days to consider whether you will pick up a spiritual practice for Lent – all 6 weeks of it. I will prepare some resources for people to use if they are prepared to do this. I will only give them to people who will commit to using them. If people want to meet during Lent, let me know and we can arrange it. Just a mini step really, but good practice for the way in which we need to continue – being post Enlightenment, progressive AND spiritual people. We may just have invented a newthing! Then we might have confidence in the church for the future!

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1. http://inwardoutward.org/ministries/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)