I first lead a service here remembering Parihaka 8 years ago, and most years since we have had a service connected with the story, so I hope many of you will know at least the outline. If you are new to this, come and ask questions later! On Thursday, Te Ture Haeata ki Parihaka, Parihaka Reconciliation Act 2019 came into force. The act confirms the commitments to reconcilation made by the Crown and the people of Parihaka. It includes an apology for the historical atrocities, and acknowledges seven Acts of Parliament which resulted in the oppression and dispossession of the Parihaka community. It includes protection of the name, Parihaka. And it also includes a legacy statement, written by the Parihaka community, to summarise the origins of the Parihaka community and its principles, to describe its history, and to set out its aspirations for the future. One of the symbolic changes that was made as the bill progressed was to have the legacy statement in English and Te Reo Maori side by side, instead of one after the other. This is Te Tikanga Tuku Iho, the legacy statement.

(The English translation of the legacy statement was read aloud: <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2019/0060/latest/DLM7397116.html?search=ts_act%40bill%40regulation%40deemedreg_parihaka_resel_25_a&p=1#DLM7397116>)

I want to offer reflections on two experiences engaging with the reconciliation bill. The first was the journey my mother and I made to Parihaka, to make a submission. Our ancestor is mentioned in the legacy statement. “A white horse bearing Bryce’s hostility pushing through the hospitality of mothers.” Bryce was a key figure leading the attack by the crown, both on the ground and through legislation. At the hearing, the Māori affairs select committee were the face of the crown today. It was important to me for us to be present, as the descendants of the crown in 1881.

On the journey we visited places that my ancestors had lived, and farmed. I saw the dairy farms stretching across the fertile volcanic plains, where once great forests grew. And the fact that the land my ancestors farmed was confiscated land, and from it we have benefited through the generations, came into sharper focus for me. In contrast, arriving at Parihaka we saw remnants of land, buildings in need of repair, and a community lacking many services. The loss of land, of resources, of community, has been great, through the generations.

The theme that comes to my mind as I think about the submissions we heard that day, is of the weight that is being carried by the people of Parihaka. The weight of loss and disposition. The weight of intergenerational trauma. We heard from whanau how the distress caused when women were raped by the colonial forces has reverberated through the generations. The weight of witnessing the descendants of the troops expressing their feelings of guilt and grief. The weight of trying to protect their history and identity with constant requests to use the name and story, as well as those who take and use without even a request.

Despite the sense I had of the toll it takes, carrying this weight, there was also a willingness to reach out. My mother and I felt the aroha and manakitanga of the community there, who sung a waiata with us, hugged us, and invited us back to join in the life of the community.

One of the submitters on the bill, Puna Wano-Bryant, said “While we will continue to teach our grandchildren the experiences of their tupuna we want them to remember us singing, dancing and celebrating who we are as Parihaka - resilient, rich in history, a sentinel for robust engagement, a citadel for hope, conflict resolution and peace.”

The second experience I want to share, is of witnessing that singing, dancing and celebrating. We were invited by Parihaka Whanui to join them at Parliament for the third reading of Te Piri Haeata ki Parihaka. The overwhelming sense I had on that day was of people looking to the future with hope and expectation. The words of Ruakere Hond were echoed through the day. “Ehara tēnei ko te rangi whakamutunga, engari ko tēnei te whakamutunga o te tīmatanga." This is could have been framed as the ending point of a long process, but Ruakere named it as the ending of the beginning. A dawning of possibilities. Of spiritual healing. Of a new relationship with the crown. And the beginning of a relationship of trust. Trust in the crown to support Parihaka to realise it’s vision. This is the start of the journey.

The vision for the future is of a sustainable, self-sufficient and thriving community. It includes plans for food production and renewable energy, and improvements ranging from the refurbishment of significant buildings, to reliable internet access. It will ensure care for the people of Parihaka, with eco-friendly housing, a health centre and assisted living facility, and for the environment, with replanting along waterways and sustainable waste management. It includes concern for cultural taonga, seeking a revival of traditional practices for the end-of-life journey, and a Māori immersion holiday programme. Facilities such as a visitor’s centre and a cycle trail will benefit visitors and create employment opportunities. And the vision will ensure that Parihaka will continue to make a wider contribution, encompassing a peace studies centre and an artist studio.

Looking to the past, Parihaka was a vibrant, self-sufficient community, with a vision and values that drew people from far and wide. Looking to the future, that is what must be rebuilt.

The verses we heard this morning speak of hope in a God who will restore favour, who will allow God’s people to reap a harvest from the land, who promises the sun will shine again on those living in darkness, and peace will come on earth.

The people of Parihaka have held on to such hope in times of darkness some of us can scarce imagine. Now they are at the beginning of rebuilding. They have reached the ending of the beginning, but colonisation leaves many barriers still in place.

In the context of critiquing the celebration of Cook’s arrival, Ani Mikaere says “Let’s not underestimate the power that WE have. The maintenance of colonial power & privilege requires us to be participants. Not participating is not doing nothing. Refusal is the very least we can do.”

I would like to invite us as a community to explore what we can do as part of clearing the way for the journey of reconciliation to continue, and strengthening the pathways of peace. Drawing on inspiration from our faith tradition, and from the legacy of Parihaka, what is our place in the continuing story?

BLESSING

We go out, invited to walk the pathways of peace and reconciliation.

May prophets guide us on the way of peace,

May the God of liberation give us courage to challenge oppression,

May the spirit inspire us with hope for change,

And may the strength of community support us on the journey.