

The Treaty of Friendship: 60th Anniversary of the Treaty of Friendship between Samoa and New Zealand.

By Rev Dr Fei Taule'ale'ausumai

It's not everyday you open an email and there's an invitation to accompany the Prime Minister of New Zealand on an international trip to Samoa. It was indeed an honour and a privilege to be able to do so.

We flew out on Monday morning on an RNZAF airplane approximately 60 delegates 22 VIP's, media and political leaders from all the political parties. We arrived in Samoa and once we landed we were met on the tarmac and escorted by police to our hotel. We had time to refresh before we were whisked off to the opening Ava Ceremony held at the Robert Louis Stevenson museum. This was followed by a beautiful dinner and dancing and fire dance.

One of my relatives a young NZ born 32 Neil Tapu was the Prime Minister Rt. Hon Jacinda Arden's orator. He was also the orator for Rt. Hon Fiame Naomi Mataafa when she visited NZ recently. I asked him how and where as a NZ born Samoan did he get his depth and breadth of oratory from. He told me that his father used to tell him bed time stories unbeknown to him growing up were actually part of the legends and narratives of oratory that matai/chief tell in their oratorial speeches. He said he went to a funeral and a matai was speaking and he was telling the same story he heard as a bedtime story and when he went home he told his father and his father responded. That was my intention that you would grow up with these stories and they would be familiar, now you have joined the dots, my hope was that you would remember these stories and cherish them because they are significant and important chief stories to be used in giving oratorial speeches. This was my

hope. Who would have known that at 32 he would become the tulafale or the orator for both Samoan and NZ prime ministers.

The treaty of friendship which was signed on the 1st August 1962 affirms that the relationship for NZ and Samoa as Governments of sovereign and equal states, are founded upon respect for fundamental human rights, recognising that friendship, confidence and a mutual endeavour to obtain their peoples fuller opportunities for social progress have established a specially intimate relationship between them and so forth.

After the festivities my other aunty Tili the older sister of Peseta Noumea met me at the Taumeasina Hotel where we all stayed and we had supper together and talked the night away.

The next morning my niece and my namesake came to have breakfast with me before she went to work. We then travelled to the towncentre for a flag raising ceremony and guard of honour where the Rt. Hon. Jacinda Adern inspected the police force. Afterwards the politicians went off to a combined cabinet meeting while the rest of us were invited to a Business market exhibition where we were able to sample the various goods and crafts and we were each given a gift bag to bring home with us. We then headed back to the Taumeasina Hotel for a formal luncheon. I was honoured to say the grace to bless the gathering and the food. Christopher Luxon and myself and the CEO of the ministry of Pacific Peoples talked about our morning and Christopher Luxon said he was pleased with the way their combined cabinet meeting went. He said that they were all united in discussing the various issues and it felt really good that different political parties could all agree and meet in unity.

We concluded with prayer and blessing led by the other two clergy including a catholic priest and then we headed for the airport. The whole trip was 28 hours in total it was fleeting but it was jam packed and full on. I said to my aunty the CEO of foreign affairs who had organised the whole visit that it was a shame that it was for only one night. And she laughed and responded “That one night was a lot of work for our country to organise and one night was probably more than enough for us to cope with.

Lets now take a look at the sermon that was preached for the occasion from the book of Samuel on the friendship between David and Jonathan.

The minister Rev. Nu’ausala Siasia preached about the love of Jonathon and David and talked about their friendship and he related it to the Treaty of friendship between Samoa and New Zealand. This is the actual text that he referred to:

1 Samuel 18:1-4 ³ Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. ⁴ And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. ⁵ And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him, so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants. He highlighted the gifting of Jonathon’s robes to David and his armour and sword and belt and exclaimed that this was an act of true friendship.

However, there were certain texts that he omitted to share that spoke more of the depth and breadth of love that Jonathon and David shared for one another:

1 Samuel 18: 1. Good news version: Saul and David finished their conversation. After that, Saul's son Jonathon was deeply attracted to David and came to love him as much as he loved himself.

1 Samuel 20:17

¹⁷ And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.

41 both he and Jonathon were crying as they kissed each other. David's grief was even greater than Jonathon's.

2 Samuel 1:26

I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.

Another bible translation says, And David's love for Jonathon superseded that of a woman.

For the LGBTQI community it is a story that celebrates same sex relationships and is affirming for them in their faith in that it comes straight from the biblical text which many choose to ignore. I'm sure that homophobic people would beg to differ and say that we are misinterpreting or reading too much into the text.

We only know part of the story when we read the bible selectively and only take out those verses that appeal to our particular interest at any particular time. The bible needs to be read in its entirety. There are wonderful stories that challenge as well as celebrate and there are also the texts of terror according to Phyllis Trible which we also tend to sweep under the carpet.

At the end of the day the bible needs to be read in context. Every book every chapter and every verse has a context and needs to be read in that context. This is called the Sitz im leben a German phrase roughly translating as “setting in life”. It stands for the context in which a text, or object has been created, and its function and purpose at that time. The sitz im leben is also used to refer to the social ethnic and cultural setting of a site at a particular era. When interpreting a text, object or region, the sitz im leben has to be taken into consideration in order to allow a proper contextual interpretation.

I encourage you when you have time to sit down and read the book of Samuel that references Jonathon and David and make up your own mind as to its interpretation.

All in all my trip to Samoa with the Prime Minister of New Zealand and meeting the Prime Minister of Samoa once again was a trip of a lifetime, it was short but sweet and one that I will treasure.

Now, like in the words of Christopher Luxon after a time of sharing and unity “back to normality”. I have now shifted into my new home, still got one more truck load of furniture to deliver this afternoon. Tomorrow clean up the rental property and then settle back into the bliss of my own space and my own terms, no more landlord and no more annoying neighbours.

May God bless you all over this coming week as we farewell Betty Houtman and go about our daily tasks. Amen.