

Sermon Archive 491

Sunday 30 June, 2024

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Matariki Readings and Reflections

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Introducing the Sisters

Matariki is the mother, who with her daughters comes down each year to visit her mother, Papatuanuku, the earth. One of her daughters is called Waipunarangi. If we were to do a typical Western dissection of a lovely name, gracelessly chopping it up into bits, we'd find Wai (water), puna (spring, pool, source), and rangi "sky". Waipunarangi meaning the spring or pool of water in the sky - so clouds, so rain.

It's said that if, at Matariki, Waipunarangi is bright in the sky compared to her sisters, then there won't be a lot of rain. If she's obscured, then batten down the hatches. Is that right? Well that's the story!

It's observed that when the rain falls, it waters the earth, so causes life to come forth. The water then is taken back up into the clouds, so it can rain again. There is a cycle. That which is given, is then received, that it may be given again. It's a cycle of generosity and sharing that enables life. The rain is good.

We know, don't we, those of us whose drains didn't work as they should have, that **too much rain** brings tears. A flooded garage in Papanui was inconvenient. An overwhelmed drain in the Wairau Valley (Tāmaki Makaurau's North Shore) swept two people to the deaths. And pretty much a whole fruit industry in Hawkes Bay disappeared into the silt - (not to mention the "slash"). Half way through a television interview the other week, a student at Hukarere Girl's School in the Esk Valley pauses mid-description of her boarding house's evacuation, to compose herself. She will carry forever, perhaps, what goes wrong when Waipunarangi is "out of sorts".

When she is "in sorts", though, the rain waters the earth, we learn of giving, receiving, returning.

Parallel, in some other time and place, the early Christians are looking for a symbol of new life. As people awaken to faith, seek a way of immersing themselves in a gift of new life, they go with water as that symbol. "Take me to the river, wash my sins away". Rise from the water to love and serve. - It's

receiving the washing of life, in order to live, and then to pass on the blessing. Rain from heaven, water for living, we all find meaning in the rain. So, mānawatia a Matariki Waipunarangi. God bless you.

Also with Matariki is Waipunarangi's sister, Ururangi. There's a story about her being so eager to be with her mother that she raced past all her sisters to beat them to her. There was a kind of "leaving them in her wake" thing. Whoosh - what was that? Where did she come from, and where did she go? So fast! So, she's associated with the wind - fly like the wind!

And yes, it is said that if at Matariki she is bright in the sky, the year will be windy.

And a wee bit of wind is useful if you are travelling across the sea, and don't want to be becalmed. A wee bit of wind is useful if you are a tree and need you seeds to be blown into a nook or cranny. A wee bit of wind is useful if you want the smoke blown away from the chimney. The wind might even be useful if you're looking for an image of playful spiritedness - the North wind is blowing the leaves! When Ururangi is well, then wonderful, moving, playful, energetic is the wind.

When she's out of sorts, the world blows over. The towers fall, the trees break; the flying trampoline crashes onto the neighbour's car, "we're not in Kansas anymore, Toto" says Dorothy.

Parallel, in some other time and place, the early Christians are looking for a symbol for this new presence and power in their midst, moving them, causing them to breathe and speak, bringing them together. And they go with the Spirit wind. "A great wind has come upon our house", they say - something like the wind that blew upon the waters at the beginning of creation. "Ruach", said the Hebrews (breath, wind, life force). "Pneuma", said the Greeks (breath, spirit, soul). "Lord Holy Spirit, you blow like the wind in a thousand paddocks". We all find meaning in the wind; so mānawatia a Matariki, Ururangi. God bless you.

Music for Reflection

The First Lesson: Genesis 7:11-18, 7:23-8:1

A Reflection: Hoping in the dark

We might lower the blinds, draw the curtains, turn on a few brave little lamps in the corners. **They** pull up the gangway, shut the doors, since Waipunarangi is clearly out of sorts. Has she been talking to the One who regrets making the world?

One little family (a wee remnant of humanity trying to do its best) is hunkering down in the dark, while rain beats down and the earth is disappearing. I don't know whether this a time of telling stories, since maybe this is a moment when they know one flood story is going to eclipse all the others, and they don't know yet how the eclipsing one is going to end. Is this safe-space **strong** enough to save them? Listening to how the structure is creaking and groaning, and knowing that if it fails there's nothing to be done, maybe they **do** tells stories, and dance and eat and drink as if there's no tomorrow! What are you meant to do when the world has turned to water? (And if you want to do some demythologising, just remember that this story comes from the same book where a few chapters earlier the water was a symbol for the chaos within which God had to create order.) There's chaos out there! When Waipunarangi is out of sorts, when God is regretful, there's chaos.

Does one confront it? Does one attempt to push back the sea? Well maybe sometimes one thinks one should. But in this instance, the chaos is so global, that the only option now is to huddle in the safest place (an ark), drop the blinds, be together, wait it out.

At Matariki, when the world was at its rainiest, its coldest, its least obviously full of life, Māori whānau went inside, lit the fire, and cooked up food that warms. They spoke about whom they had lost, said their karakia. They played their games, sang their song. They looked for the coming again of the warmth.

Is there perhaps a time for this? And is there not a value in taking the darkest day as a time to express hope. The value of light within the darkness. The importance of singing of our preservation . . .

We sing . . .

Hymn: Round me falls the night

The Second Lesson: Matthew 7: 24-27

A Reflection: Building for wind and rain

In our darkened place, one of the stories we tell is from the mouth of Jesus. It's about two people really, each trying to build a house. What are they going to do with their houses? Live in them, probably - or rent them out if they already have one to live in. Whatever.

What Jesus takes for granted as these houses are being built, is that rain, wind and flood are going to come - because they do, don't they? Whatever

we're trying to create when we build, it's going to have to contend with Waipunarangi and Ururangi being "out of sorts". Neither sister is malevolent; but maybe sometimes is provoked by circumstances. Anyway

. . .

Because rain and wind are givens (much like death and taxes), build what you build, says Jesus, on something solid. If you're building on sand, then it's going to crumble and fall. "Build on rock" he says.

The ark family might well say, "where might that rock be, Jesus? Somewhere down there under all that water?" For them, the rock is their hope in the One who called them to fashion the ark. "All their hope on God is founded - who does still their trust renew."

The Matariki whānau also might go looking for where they're going to build their coming year. Where is the rock? In the remembering of their dead? In their gathering around the fire? In their quiet husbandry of the land on which they stand?

And the Knox family? Where's **our** solid ground? "Everyone who hears these words of mine (says Jesus) and acts on them, will be like a wise one who built the house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall.

There is no simple answer to our mid-winter question "how do we build, so as not to fall?" But central to it will have to be our engagement with whatever it was the Jesus was trying to express about being a child of God. Is it looking at the stars, and marvelling that somehow still we are significant? Is it lifting our sail to the Spirit of the Wind? Is it receiving, then giving, that others might receive? Is it hoping in the darkness that we'll be OK, and taking seriously the ways that our capacity to trust is given life by the rain. Living well on the earth. Living well in the love of God.

From the darkness of the winter, I say to you mānawatia a Matariki. Thanks be to God.

Hymn: All my hope on God is founded

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