

Sermon Archive 594

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Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reflections for Matariki

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An Introduction: Herenga Waka - safe harbour for many waka

We've noted at Matariki in previous years, that the season falls at a time in winter, when the earth is sleeping, the days are short and the nights are long. It's at a time when Māori families stayed at home, lit fires, and gathered around them to tell stories within the safety of their closest people - the whānau. Gather for the warmth, the soft and flickering light, the shelter from the rain, protection from the dark. Close people coming close, to tell the stories, to find themselves within the stories, and know that they belong. It's about safe harbour.

The theme chosen for this Matariki is "Herenga Waka". The te reo Pakeha word often chosen to explain "herenga" is "harbour / mooring place". "Waka" is often translated as canoe - but in te reo Māori it's not just canoe. It's the way we've travelled - how we got to where we are. So the expression "Herenga Waka" is all about how our own canoes have found a place, together, to be safely harboured.

How did your waka bring you to this moment? Part of your waka was the parents who made you, either clumsily or skilfully. Part of your waka is how you learned to bear yourself, what you've chosen to do with your talents and gifts (stories of growth, potential realised or lost). Part of it is who you've met along the way - how you've been hurt or blessed. Part of it is how this curious thing called the gospel has found a place in your heart, mind, soul and strength - why you are in church today.

Your waka (that brought you here) has done its own journey, coming in a particular way and from a particular place not shared by any of the other people in this church, in which we worship God. Mine also, has had its own course, storms, times of becalming, glorious sunsets, sunrises, times of thirst, catching of fish, following the stars.

But now, in this moment, we find ourselves in **one** place, a whare karakia (a house of prayer). Is it a herenga (a harbour), where each waka moors in calm, stillness, safety, room for our arrival - where maybe we can clamber off our waka, go to the house where there is kai, and manaaki, and whanaungatanga, and story-telling in which we all can see ourselves?

If so, dare I say that the Spirit invites you to moor your journey, to come alongside all the others who have stopped their waka to take a rest - and hear a few stories - in which we may indeed recognise ourselves, and perceive the love that considers us one.

There's a story of a bereaved woman whose circumstances exile her from her deepest belonging, only to realise that home is where love is. There's a story of another woman, well aware that her waka and his waka came from what seems like very different places, only to learn that there is a harbour for many waka, given by God, which, soon, she certainly will see - and into which she surely can enter.

"Where cross the crowded ways of life,
where sound the cries of race and clan,
above the noise of selfish strife
we seek your voice, the safety of your holy herenga,
O Jesus Christ, the Son of Man."

Hymn: Where cross the crowded ways of life

Lesson: Ruth 1: 1-18

A Reflection: Where you go, I will go
 In the harbour, something special has grown.

This waka came down from the North, from the land of Judah. It carried people fleeing a famine, looking for a place that could sustain their life. Not a huge ask, is it, to live? To find a harbour that was safe! Maybe just to moor for a short while, while other places were stormy.

On the waka is a married couple, with two sons. One of the sons . . . well, you heard the reading. No need to repeat it!

Ruth, a native of the land of Moab finds love with one of the sons. With the love (what did was say about marriage in a sermon two weeks ago? - we assume love) comes economic viability. Ruth has a man, so it's viable - and maybe it's loving - and maybe she rejoices in all the waka has brought.

Then smiles turn to tears, because Death, that rotten old bastard, comes in and kicks the household down. Death, the prick. Death, the thief, Death the grinning, giggling loathsome thing to be despised!

Doesn't matter how insulting we become, Death changes Ruth's situation, and her sister's situation, and Naomi's situation. The safe harbour, the herenga, now seems to be a place from which reason dictates they ought to go.

This brings a crisis to the vulnerable wee community of women. Naomi feels she has no option, really, other than to get in her waka and go back home. And she sees no reason at all that her widowed daughters-in-law should follow her. Because they are creatures of Moab. They know nothing of their mother-in-law's homeland. Their best chances are in the place that they know.

And for one of the daughters, that is a persuasive point. Orpah stays in Moab, where she belongs. But for Ruth, the problem is that she has lost the man she loves, and the only love remaining is that which she has for Naomi. She weeps, she clings, she says:

Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people
and your God my God.

Where you die, I will die,
and there will I be buried.
May the Lord do thus to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!"

For Ruth, it has become evident that the safe harbour, the place where she safely can moor, is something steeped in human love. During the time that Naomi's waka was moored in Moab, something priceless has grown. She will not let it go.

Herenga waka. A place where people of many places safely can moor their waka for a while. Some stay. Some go away again. But at the heart of the decision about what to do, and where to go (to stay or not to stay) is this thing that grows in the meantime - the love.

So here, in this place called Aotearoa, we have moored our waka. Come on into the whare. we'll light a fire, we'll share our kai. Manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, tell the stories in which we may recognise ourselves. The days are short; the nights are long; the earth is resting - and we are realising that love can grow in the meantime.

If God blesses the Matariki, then many waka find a harbour that is home.

Hymn: Where the road runs out

Lesson: John 4: 5-23

A Reflection: A vision in the harbour: a day is coming

Much room is given in this story about Jesus meeting the woman from Samaria. Her waka brings her to the well every day. It's something of a regular bus run. Coming in, from somewhere else, is the Jesus waka, with twelve others in train - although the train just now has gone into town to find some food.

Two cultures meet at the well - cultures who, each in their own way, are well attuned to be suspicious about the other. Samaritans and Jews, you know. There is much awareness about the separate places from which they've come, and how there are many good reasons why this never will work. For goodness sake, they don't even share cups or saucers. But today both waka arrive at this well. Maybe she can be safe from her people, and he can speak without scrutiny from his. Is it a safe harbour? He's certainly wanting a drink of water. Water is what she also is seeking. Two thirsty people? Herenga waka.

According to current mapping, and cultural shifting, the woman is at home, and Jesus is the one whose waka is arriving - although he's presenting an argument based on his connection to Jacob, his ancestor, about whose well this is. Shall we leave the cultural arguments about ownership of the well for the moment. She's got a bucket, and he doesn't. He's a man, and she's a woman, so the power dynamics are kind of flapping about between them. He has vision, and she has grit. For this passing moment, their waka come to this harbour - for a mooring that might protect them. He asks for water. She talks about water. He speaks of another water, that might cause anyone, in any waka, never to thirst again.

"A day is coming", he says, "when it won't matter too much about whether you worship on this mountain, or that mountain. The new thing that will ascend is the matter of Spirit and truth - and that will bring the many waka together.

-ooOoo-

This year's Matariki theme is about many waka finding shelter in one harbour. It speaks to our thinking about what we are building here in these islands, this land.

We, as people of faith, form a conviction that within the faith we've inherited, and which the Spirit makes true each day, trace themes of welcome, of love uniting, of shelter given to many.

To the God who welcomes all into the safe harbour of heaven's love, we commend our thinking, and keep a moment of quiet.

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