

Waiapu Cathedral, Napier – 10th June 2012
 Te Pouhere Sunday / Stewardship Sunday (and Parish AGM)
 Rev'd Dr Jenny Dawson, Bishop's Chaplain, Hawke's Bay

Genesis 3: 8-15; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 4: 13 - 5: 1; Mark 3: 20-35

Every year about this time I start getting itchy feet
 to go travelling overseas.
 Obviously the idea of warm sunshine is powerfully attractive.
 But it's not all.
 Through the chattering teeth of a frosty morning I will say to my husband
 "I want to go to a Pacific island" and he replies "You live on one!"

I realize what I crave is more than sun.
 I simply love being in a different culture.
 I enjoy the richness of different languages and food
 and coming to terms with strange social expectations.

Yet the strange culture in today's gospel reading doesn't attract me at all.
 It's too easy to forget that Jesus lived in a very different time and place.
 I think this passage is Mark inviting people to decide
 whether Jesus was a liar or a lunatic
 or the Lord whom they would follow.

This challenge gets lost for us in language about Beelzebul
 and demons and blasphemy.
 We also miss most of the references to naming,
 part of the Middle Eastern culture of honour and shame –
 which are found all through the gospels –
 but we don't notice because honour and shame are not part
 of our thinking.

Perhaps this very strangeness can help us here at the Cathedral
 on this day when we are keeping Te Pouhere Sunday,
 when there is an AGM happening,
 and when people are thinking deeply about their stewardship offerings.

These things all remind me that as Christians
 we are called to live into a radically different culture.

Firstly, Te Pouhere Sunday, a gift from the General Synod to us.
 We remember today *The Constitution/Te Pouhere*
 being approved at the 1992 General Synod.
 It became the legal basis of the now re-named
Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia / He Mihinare
ki Aotearoa ki Niu Tireni, ki Nga Moutere o Te Moana Nui a Kiwa.

We Anglicans in this place and time
 are in a new world and a new culture.
 We learn to be partners – even when the partner is not with us.
 We learn that resource sharing is a continuing story
 as the past is healed gradually.
 We glimpse a future that we cannot yet know.

In 1991, as the constitution was being discussed,
 Muru Walters – now Bishop – wrote that
The Revised Constitution/Te Pouhere
 would be a place to tie up so you don't get swept away by the tide.
Te Pouhere means literally the hitching post.
 For Maori, it is the place where a waka is tied at the end of the day,
 not a piece of ground or a pa or a permanent headquarters,
 simply a place to tie up to so the boat is not swept away by the tide.

Part of that is understanding both our distinctiveness as separate tikanga
 and our unity.
 There is a proverb "*Kotahi ano te kohao o te ngira e kuku ai te miro ma,*
te miro mangu, te miro whero."
 It is attributed to the first Maori King, Potatau te Wherowhero,
 in 1858, and translates as
 "There is only one eye of the needle, through which the white thread, the
 black thread and the red thread must pass".
 That one eye of the needle could be seen as the way of Christ.

We learn deeply about that way through our life as Christian community.
 That's why it is important to remember
 that the other two aspects of what we are doing today
 are also expressions of a different culture, the way of Christ.

The AGM today is not like the AGM of a club.

It does of course have proper procedure but that must be seen in a radically different context.

You might remember the Acts readings we had every Sunday in the Easter season. They were stories of how the early church learned how to organise its life in ways that honoured what Jesus had taught them. Our church meetings must never be political lobbying from one interest group or another. The life of our church is about mutuality and service, to the glory of God. That is why it is so good to share Eucharist together before the AGM. We are reminded of who we are, and whose we are.

Christian stewardship is another faith opportunity for us. Some of you are offering your stewardship commitments today, others are still thinking about it. It's a good time today to remind ourselves of some principles about our faith that may shape how we think of our money – however much we have.

No.1 - Nothing in all creation is outside the care of God:
We remember God so loved the world,
God knows every hair on our head,
and that Jesus talked about money.

No.2 - Christian stewardship is about God, not about me.
Generosity changes us
because it means we join in the work of God.

No.3 - Christian stewardship is about our relationship with the church.
That means it is not just about giving money to worthy causes.
Regularly giving a significant gift to the praying community
which is our Christian family is our prime commitment.

No.4 – It's about giving our best, the first-fruits.
Not about what we have left: the “garage sale mentality”.
It's about prayerfully choosing the amount or proportion of our
income that we will give to the church, and giving it first.
We do that most effectively through Automatic Payments
so leaders in our praying community know how much money
there is likely to be for budgeting.

No.5 - Our Christian giving is not just for this lifetime.
Is the church in your will? Mine says that my estate will give a
small percentage to “the church where I currently worship”....

No.6 - As we are to be prayerful and thoughtful in every aspect of our
lives, so with our giving which means we will probably choose to
give a planned amount to the church regularly.

What's not up to us to choose is whether we live in a different culture.
I don't mean finding a place to lie in the sun in July.
Every aspect of what we do as Christians calls us deeper
into the new way of living which began at our baptism.

We spend our lives learning to be at home in the culture of Christ.

From these three readings today
we learn that means being challenged to re-frame our field of concern
to include all of God's family.

The way we are Christian together, in our three-tikanga church,
as we do the business of an AGM,
even how we think about stewardship,
all are about restoring true family
so that creation serves its original purpose —
full life for all God's creatures.

That is the strange culture into which we Christians are called.
It is the hope for which the world yearns.