



Sermon

A Gospel-Inspired Treaty

1 Kings 8:55-51; Ephesians 2:13 - 22; Matthew 18:21-35

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Writing to the Ephesians, Paul is talking to gentiles who have come to know that Yahweh is the only God and they have come to worship him through Jesus Christ. There has been reconciliation between Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ.

Solomon's prayer (from the OT reading) has been answered in a more profound way than he could have imagined. Not only have the other nations come to know that Yahweh is God, but they have been made one with the Jewish believers in Christ!

When we are in Christ, barriers are broken down, hostility is wiped out because we are unified by our common adoration of the Father, indwelt by the same Spirit and positioned in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was to reconcile people to the Father that Jesus came and preached peace with God. It was for that reason that missionaries travelled and still travel to other places to reach those who are far off from God and to bring them into Christ.

As tomorrow is Waitangi Day, It is important for us to know a bit of Christian history.

In England, in the 1700's, there was a great revival mainly under the preaching of John Wesley and George Whitfield.

Wesley was used by God in a remarkably way to revive the Church in England. The Church was in a bad way in England with little understanding of the gospel message, ministers failing to attend to their duties at all, and exclusion of the poor.

Although, John and his brother, Charles, were both ordained in the Church of England, sadly, it was more ready to be offended by the revival than to embrace it. The Church of England closed ranks against the Wesley brothers and sought to suppress their ministries. However, such was the strength of this move of God, that in fact the wider Church was changed not just those who became known as Methodists.

This revival which swept through Britain and America established Evangelicalism. The Evangelical movement has as core values the importance of personal conversion, a high regard for Biblical

authority and an emphasis on proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus. I hope you recognise those characteristics as typical of this parish for we are an evangelical parish.

There is often confusion between evangelical and evangelism. Evangelism is seeking to lead people to Christ and is not confined to Evangelicals.

One of the converts to Christ in this revival was John Newton the slave trader who repented and in time was ordained. It was he who wrote "Amazing Grace" to describe his conversion. Now John Newton founded a group of largely prominent and wealthy, committed, evangelicals which became known as the Clapham Sect. The dominant player became William Wilberforce. This group applied their beliefs to the betterment of society and the world. They tackled slavery and prison reform; they established the Church Missionary Society, the Bible Society and the Sunday School Society. And this is only name five out of 260 societies they formed.

All peoples need to hear of our God and what he has done for them in Jesus Christ. It was the Church Missionary Society which sent missionaries to NZ in response to the invitation of Maori after Samuel Marsden had first preached here in 1814.

They were brave – very brave indeed. To travel to the other side of the world in a small vessel, with a high risk of injury, drowning or some other death, to break new ground far from all support, to settle near warring tribes of a people of vastly different culture and language – these are acts of considerable courage. But they were impelled by the desire to bring the knowledge of Christ to all people. And it changed the Maori people; they heard the gospel and chose to believe. As they followed Christ they came into obedience to his ways. In time their preaching bore remarkable fruit. It is estimated that 70% of Maori were committed Christians by the mid 1800's.

NZ was the last of the British colonies – and the missionary hopes were that it would not be colonised. In the 1820s discussions began regarding opening NZ for limited colonisation. The Clapham Sect at home and missionaries from NZ petitioned British parliament against this, citing the disastrous consequences of colonisation for the native peoples of other lands, and pleading for the preservation of the Maori people, their lands, language and culture.

They were only one voice amongst many competing ones on the issue of colonisation. However, the overall effect of the debate in Britain was the realisation that the government needed to enter into a formal treaty with Māori that would protect indigenous Māori rights over land, bush, river and seas in exchange for British protection and sovereignty. Lt-Governor William Hobson was therefore sent from Sydney in January 1840 to achieve that end. He had a mandate written by Lord Normanby of the Colonial Office that expressed that the goal was to 'overt this disaster' (of colonisation) if possible – but if not 'to mitigate it'. Lord Normanby's permanent undersecretary was James Stephen a brother-in-law of Wilberforce and another member of the Clapham Sect. He prepared instructions for Hobson which included:

- All dealings with Māori must be conducted with sincerity, justice, and good faith.
- They must not be permitted to enter into any contracts in which they might be ignorant and unintentional authors of injuries to themselves.
- You will not, purchase from them any territory that would be essential, or highly conducive, to their own comfort, safety or subsistence.

The Treaty that resulted was only as it was because of the efforts of bold and visionary Christians amongst the British Parliamentarians and their CMS friends here in NZ. The Treaty expressed the highest Christian ideals of its time – trying to protect the Maori people from disrespect, and the loss of their lands, language and culture. It was an attempt at justice – though unfortunately before it's time.

At the time many Māori believed the Treaty enabled Pakeha and Māori to be one people in both a spiritual and societal sense. Affirming this was Hobson's words to each Chief as they completed their signing of the Treaty at Waitangi were "He iwi tahi tatou"- now we are all one people. His words were selected by CMS missionary Henry Williams and are loosely based on the Ephesians 2 passage we read.

Today, we are the inheritors of their work. NZ is one of the few nations which was formed on Christian roots. Only here was there a genuine treaty between colonizer and local people which recognized the claims and rights of the local people. Nearly all other cases were by conquest not agreement.

We are inheritors, but the good will of those negotiations in 1840 has not been consistently observed. There have been breaches, tensions and offences against the spirit of that treaty. This is not the time to point fingers against either party.

What we can say is that the road to reconciliation, the pathway to peace is in forgiveness.

In the gospel reading, we heard a portion of Jesus' teaching on forgiveness. Forgiveness is very important to Jesus. Not only is he concerned to provide forgiveness to us, but that we allow that to flow onto other people. If we are forgiven, he says, we will want to forgive others. The first followers of Jesus were a very mixed bunch – there were rough fishermen alongside a palace steward, Roman collaborators beside terrorist opponents. Jesus nicknamed two brothers, "the sons of thunder" which gives an idea of their temper. So there must have been plenty of friction within the followers as they lived alongside each other for three years. Hardly surprising then that Peter comes to ask Jesus about forgiving one of the other disciples. He has got the idea that Jesus expects us to forgive each other but how far does it go? He suggests the generous figure of seven times. That is pretty good really. But Jesus responds as we heard with not seven times but seventy-seven times.

He probably is contrasting this attitude to a report in the early chapters of Genesis, when a man called Lamech killed a young man who had wounded him. He boasted that he would have 77 times revenge. In contrast, Jesus says we should have the opposite spirit which forgives and forgives again. To forgive seventy-seven times is to keep forgiving indefinitely.

Some of us find it hard to forgive. Some of us have given up. But that will not do for Jesus. He does not suggest but commands that we forgive each other. And if he commands you to do it, it must be possible to do. If you are sitting on resentment, if you are holding smouldering anger in your heart, if you refuse to talk to someone, if you cut them out of your life, then you are directly disobeying Jesus. He says it is so important that if you do not forgive others, God cannot forgive you. "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."

Practically, if Jesus commands to forgive is must be possible. What we and many others have learnt is that forgiveness is an act of the will not at first a feeling. We need to make the choice to forgive. Secondly, forgiveness is not saying the offence does not matter. It is saying that God is the judge not me. We forgive by declaring it and handing judgement back to God who is the only one who can handle it without being destroyed by it.

We find it useful for people to say aloud, "I choose to forgive so-and-so, for such-and-such in Jesus name and I release him from my judgement." It is simple but a huge relief when we just do it.

The Gospel changes people. It changed the first disciples; it changed the Ephesians to whom Paul wrote; it changed the Roman world; it changed the Maori people; it has changed many of us.

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¹ Genesis 4:24

I wonder if any of you need to come into line with what we have heard today.

Perhaps as you listen you realise you need to take seriously the forgiveness Jesus commands. If so, come up for prayer after the service.

Perhaps you realise that you haven't taken seriously the fact that Jesus is entrusted with judging the living and the dead and offers forgiveness of sins to those who trust him. If that is the case, come up for prayer at the end of the service and receive the offer of life for yourself.

Maybe you realise there is resentment in your heart towards Maori or Pakeha and that needs to be released and forgiven.

Tomorrow as we celebrate Waitangi Day, let's not forget the direct connection between the gospel and the founding of our nation. We would all do well to apply Solomon's words,

"... [our] hearts must be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands ..."²

"May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep the commands, decrees and regulations he gave our fathers."

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² 1 Kings 8:61