



Sermon

Two becoming one people

1 Kings 8:55-61; Ephesians 2:13-18; Luke 1:67-79

6th February 2022

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Today is Waitangi Day when we celebrate and remember the Treaty of Waitangi. There have been mixed feelings about the Treaty through the years in NZ, but it is something we as Christians can be proud of. I certainly don't mean all that has followed since, but of the Treaty itself.

We need to review history to understand the agreement and how it came about.

You will remember that we celebrated the bicentenary of the gospel first being preached in NZ in 2014. In those early 1800s, the only Europeans in New Zealand were missionaries, whalers, sealers and adventurers. The Missionaries came with earnest intent to spread the good news of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ.

The excerpt from Luke's gospel illustrates their motivation. That passage is from the prophecy of Zechariah the father of John the Baptist at the naming of his son. He prophesied that John would prepare the way of the Lord. He would give people knowledge of salvation through forgiveness of their sins. So too, the missionaries longed to proclaim the tender mercy of our God and for the light of Christ to shine on those living in darkness. This being a metaphor for sin and ignorance of salvation. This would lead them into the paths of peace – peace with God, peace within and peace with other people.

It had been a difficult start back in 1814, but by 1830s it was the most successful mission area in the world. George Clark, a missionary, wrote in 1845, that an estimated 60,000 Maori were attending church services out of a population of 90,000-120,000 – that's 50-63% - amazing impact. As we know, much of the evangelism was conducted by independent Maori evangelists spreading the gospel ahead of the missionaries.

A significant impact of the gospel on Maori was the decrease in intertribal warfare – their feet were indeed being guided into the way of peace.

At the same time, the Kororareka/Russell was receiving 1000 ships a year and offered booze and prostitutes for the frustrated sailors. It was called 'the hellhole of the South Pacific' by Charles Darwin when he visited in the 1835. He described the English inhabitants apart from the missionaries as "the very refuse of society."¹ There was no control, no one with authority over these people and the Maori chiefs were not happy about the situation.

¹ <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/charles-darwin-leaves-nz-noting-that-it-is-not-a-pleasant-place>

Missionaries too were increasingly concerned about the effect of these immigrants on Māori. But there was another even greater threat on the near horizon.

The New Zealand Company.

Originally its founders hoped to establish something like the East India Company with a Royal Charter granting them exclusive trade and the right to use military force. However, the British parliament viewed this most unfavourably.

Undeterred, they sent two ships to explore prospects in 1826. That expedition negotiated for land in the Hokianga – later claiming to have ownership of a million acres. However, the trade prospects were not strong enough and the scheme lapsed.

Interest was revived by Edward Wakefield after he was released from a 3-year prison sentence for abducting a 15-year old to marry her. His scheme was to make money out of the colony by buying land very cheaply from Maori and selling it for a substantial profit to settlers. He and his supporters exerted considerable pressure on the government to gain legal authority for their plan.

Anglican and Wesleyan missionaries were alarmed at the pamphlets circulated by Wakefield in which he wrote that the Maori could scarcely cultivate the earth and that they craved colonisation.

At a meeting on 6 June 1837 the Church Missionary Society passed four resolutions expressing its objection to the New Zealand Association plans, and resolved to use "all suitable means" to defeat the association and both the Church and Wesleyan missionary societies began to wage campaigns in opposition to the company's plans, through pamphlets and lobbying to government.

CMS was one of the many societies founded by the Clapham Sect. The Clapham Sect was a group of parishioners of Clapham in London, who resolved to change society for the good arising out of their faith in Christ. They were evangelicals with a strong social conscience. They formed literally hundreds of societies to improve society including SPCA, Children's Society, the Sunday School movement. They campaigned to prevent child factory labour, to educate children, to stop children being sent up chimneys, for missions, against slavery.

William Wilberforce was a key member who achieved the prohibition of the slave trade in 1807. It took until 1833 to achieve the prohibition on owning slaves in the British Empire.

His legal advisor was James Stephens who married William's sister. Their son, also James, married the daughter of John Venn, another Clapham Sect member who was one of the founders of CMS. This James was a lawyer who came to be the Permanent Undersecretary of State for the Colonies. The NZ encyclopaedia says:

Stephen's Christian faith and social reforming attitudes led to a pronounced humanitarian emphasis in his work and an active desire to see indigenous peoples such as Māori treated properly. He believed they should be allowed to develop into British citizens rather than destroyed or enslaved, and insisted that England had a duty to guard indigenous peoples against the greed of colonial settlers in search of a quick profit. This accounted for his opposition to Edward Gibbon Wakefield's planned settlement of New Zealand.²

The decision was made in London, somewhat reluctantly, that there were too many English people living in NZ without any government and they would have to intervene.

Sir James Stephen drafted the instructions which were given to William Hobson when he was sent to New Zealand in 1840. These [instructions included](#):

All dealings with the Aborigines for their Lands must be conducted on the same principles of sincerity, justice, and good faith as must govern your transactions with them for the recognition of

² <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/people/james-stephen>

Her Majesty's Sovereignty in the Islands. Nor is this all. 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, for example, purchase from them any Territory the retention of which by them would be essential, or highly conducive, to their own comfort, safety or subsistence. The acquisition of Land by the Crown for the future Settlement of British Subjects must be confined to such Districts as the Natives can alienate without distress or serious inconvenience to themselves. To secure the observance of this rule will be one of the first duties of their official protector.

Meanwhile in 1839, the NZ Company had pressed ahead with plans to sell NZ land without Government approval. They started selling sections in England even before the first ship had left with a survey party to prepare for occupancy. When they did negotiate it was in broken Te Reo with no concept of Maori ideas of land ownership or apparently concern as to whether the parties had any right to sell the land or concept of the areas being described.

In NZ, the Revd Henry Williams was now in charge of the CMS mission. In November 1839, he travelled to the Kapiti coast to install Octavius Hadfield at a new mission base. On that trip he learnt of the trouble brewing in Wellington and Nelson with NZ Co settlements and heard the complaints of local Maori. As he walked (yes walked) back to Tauranga there were more reports of tensions over land acquisitions.

Henry Williams arrived back in the Bay of Islands eleven days before Captain Hobson arrived. The impact of his trip was to convince him that British protection was needed to hold back the activities of the NZ Company let alone bring some restraint over the hellhole that was to become Russell.

On 4th February, Hobson gave Williams a draft for a treaty. He worked through the night translating it into Maori and then back-translating into English. On 5th, Maori chiefs gathered to discuss it. They wanted the mess of Kororareka and similar places sorted out. They saw that Europeans had desirable technology and there was concern about French ambitions to rule. Williams was able to advise them that the Treaty would be a good for them.

The next day (6th) the signing started. Hobson said to each signing chief "He iwi tahi tatou" ("we are one people"). Henry Williams gave him those words - consciously drawing on Chapter 2 of the Letter to the Ephesians.

Now that chapter is about Jewish believers in Jesus and Gentile believers being made into one people. That was a huge gulf in terms of the separatism of Judaism from Gentiles. Yet the New Covenant of the Gospel spanned that divide. Henry Williams applied it as an analogy not in terms of salvation but of citizenship. He has made the two one and destroyed the barrier. "We are one people."

Māori saw and still see the Treaty in spiritual and Christian terms. The Te Reo name for the Treaty is 'Te Kawenata o Waitangi' ('the Covenant of Waitangi').

Missionaries with considerable mana with Māori – particularly Henry Williams – took the Treaty throughout the country to be signed. Māori often signed because of the trust they had in the missionaries.

That brings us to the other reading from 1 Kings. It relates to covenant. Covenant is taken extremely seriously in Scripture. In this portion of scripture King Solomon of Israel had finished building the Temple, they had installed the Ark of the Covenant into the Holy of Holies. He has prayed to God and now he was speaking to the people about the importance of keeping the covenant. The Treaty of Waitangi is a covenant and we as people of this nation need to be careful to keep the covenant agreement which established this nation.

We as the Church can be grateful that our Christian forebears sought to restraint injustice and fought for a new concept. They said that the indigenous people of a land should be negotiated with rather than simply

conquered and that if agreement were reached, they should be able to be citizens alongside the British. This had not been done before – it was a world first.

Now as we know, the history that followed was not good. There were in were many breaches and total disregard in some quarters but the foundation was good.

Don Battley and I were discussing this last year and puzzling over why it was only about 5 years before the government was unheeding of the principles of the Treaty. I wondered if something had changed in London.

Sure enough there were two significant changes. The Whig Government of Lord Melbourne fell in 1841 to be succeeded by the Conservatives under Robert Peel from 1841-46. But do you remember Sir James Stephen? He was so influential as Permanent Undersecretary of State for the Colonies that he was nicknamed “King Stephen” and “Mr Oversecretary Stephen”. His tenure in that office lasted from 1836-1847 when he resigned due to ill health. And the NZ Company was still pressuring for greater freedoms to acquire land...

Nevertheless, we can be thankful that the Biblical concern and solid application of the Clapham Sect and Sir James Stephen in particular prevented the worst excesses of the New Zealand Company’s plans from coming to fruition and gave us a negotiated foundation for our nation.

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