**St Andrews on the Terrace Easter 3 30 April 2017 Spirituality of Life – Life and Treaty**

**Deuteronomy 10:12-19** 12And now, Israel, what does your God ask of you but to fear God, to walk in obedience, to love and serve God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13and to observe the commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? 14To God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. 15Yet God set affection on your ancestors and loved them, and chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today. 16Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. 17For God is the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes, 18 defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. 19And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

**1 Corinthians 1:26-29** 26Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29so that no one may boast.

**Henry Williams Treaty Copy** https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/interactive/henry-williams-treaty-copy

Henry Williams, who had translated the Treaty of Waitangi into Māori, sailed from the Bay of Islands on 2 April 1840 with two Māori-language copies of the document. He left one with his brother William Williams at Tūranga (Gisborne) on 8 April. He arrived at Port Nicholson (Wellington) in mid-April, but for 10 days could not persuade chiefs to sign. A meeting was finally arranged on the schooner *Ariel* on 29 April, when 39 chiefs signed. Another 34 signed at Queen Charlotte Sound and Rangitoto ki te Tonga (D’Urville Island).

In May, Williams received the agreement of chiefs at Ōtaki, Waikanae, Manawatū, Whanganui and Motu Ngārara, a small island off Kapiti Island. He had intended to take the copy to Otago, but the signatures of South Island chiefs were already being sought by Major Bunbury.

Years ago we needed to sell the house in Gore which we had build around ourselves for more years than I care to admit. I had already been in Christchurch for 2 years and was now resident in Dunedin. Roger was nearing completion of the build. One particular week he must have talked with the accountant. That evening he got a phone call from an acquaintance the same accountant. He wanted to come round. Roger phoned me later that night and said “I think I’ve sold the house”. I said “What do you mean you think you’ve sold the house?” He said “Well, I’ve shaken hands with this guy and said that he could have first refusal. He was very keen.”

I had many mixed emotions, one of which was regret I had invested in new towels for the open days which it appeared we would not now need! Though I made Roger promise he would put the towels out when the guy came back with his wife the next day!

Did I mention this took place in Southland?. That handshake was indeed the agreement to the sale, though there were a few processes which went on in between. The handshake had been given and accepted in good faith and that good faith continued through the transaction. Whether with deals and contracts that are as large as the Encyclopaedia Britannica or with deals done on the golf course at Mar a Lago or a simple handshake in the brown trout capital of NZ, any agreement requires the goodwill of both partners.

And although we might like to be completely altruistic about our deals and treaties, it is still true that in a treaty each side agrees to the treaty because they aim to get something out of it. We got the money, the guy from the next street got our house. Deal done.

In Deuteronomy, written about seven centuries before Jesus lived, and 27 centuries before we came along, the people are called into covenant, to obedience to the God they worship – but not for nothing. They are told what it is believed God, their treaty partner has already done – made and owned the whole creation, shown love and affection to their ancestors and now to the present people. God is also characterised here as impartially affectionate, defending the defenceless of the society, shows favour to foreigners, providing the necessities of life. There is a lot being built up here on God’s side of the covenant or treaty partnership, God is being talked up large – more than a few grey blankets and a bundle of muskets has already been offered here! The point is obvious – besides all this how small it seems to be asked to obey some commends and decrees, to pay respect, love, to serve and obey? Obviously, given the chequered history of the relationships between the Israelite people and the deity they called God, the people varied in their opinion at different times. Sometimes they did ***not*** think all that is said of God here ***was*** enough to repay obedience and faithfulness on their part.

And in the epistle reading today, written almost 2000 years, 20 centuries ago, the quarrelling, uppity, devisive Corinthian church is reminded by Paul that to divide into factions is to divide the Christ they follow and that can’t be right. Also, that to set themselves up as authorities and arbitrators of how church and faith must be is to contradict the upside down methods God seems to be employing. The disgraceful, shameful death of their leader is simply a God-signature for Paul. The hall mark of the Judeo-Christian God is the sheer size of the difference in method and technique from Roman Emperors. And Paul reminds his parishioners that that includes the way they were included in the kingdom of God. – being called by God does not necessarily mean they are wise or super intelligent or from the elite. For we heard read: ‘God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things which are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast.” Strong words written from a distance to attempt to quell intra-church rivalries. ‘Don’t get on your high horse, God didn’t call you because you were special but in spite of you being weak.’ How to win friends and influence people indeed! We are lucky this letter survived and we have it today – many a church might want to put it on the bonfire!

We’re hearing here that the treaty Paul has been promoting between God and the Gentile Christians he has formed in Corinth, that this treaty is not between equals. The Corinthians Christians, it seems, are not all from the aristocracy, at least at this stage of the church’s life. Perhaps it is the church he means when Paul writes that ‘things which are not’ are chosen to ‘nullify the things that are’. This struggling, neophyte group, barely deserves as yet the title ‘church’. Yet, it is the instrument which the divine chooses to influence the whole of the Roman Empire. This despite the Empire definitely having the upper hand!

Is there anything in these two examples from ancient times or indeed our own house sale from early this century which can inform our attitudes to the Treaty today, signed 177 years ago since yesterday?

First, the Israelite understanding of God sets a precedent that the powerful partner in the treaty should not over-power the other. There are massive gifts being given by the God described in Deuteronomy and also, the Corinthian church are reminded of their relative weakness compared with the strength of the God whom they envisage calling them into partnership. There is no suggestion in either of these ancient scenarios that the powerful partner will take advantage of the other, weaker partner.

In terms of firepower, the ability to govern in a western style and to make things happen world-wide, the British partners in the treaty had many advantages over Maori. Without wanting anyone to get big headed, it is like the British were God-like in their resources and ability to shape outcomes, yet whether always good faith was exercised from that powerful position is the story of our history here in New Zealand.

And yet the original settlers, some of whom founded this church, were the ones who were foreigners in this land – the British settlers were then the foreigners whom it is said God loves too. I know the southern NZ company settlers would not have got through the first winter if it were not for Maori grown food. Who is being a good Treaty partner there? Maori brought different but equally important resources to the table, not only in terms of vegetables!

These examples in scripture in which all humankind is pictured as being in partnership with divine power is what we have before us when we enter any partnership. Almost unfailingly God is pictured as standing on the side of the covenant, unmoving, always faithful. The people wander, it seems, into covenant one day and yet reneg on it the next, spend a few hundred years in good relationship and then rebel. God in the meantime is consistently pictured as standing firm. On the basis of these stories I know, if I had to choose between God and humankind for a Treaty partner, which one I would choose.

Even if God is a made-up concept here, even if you believe that, look at the dream human beings have written out in these ancient texts as what is godlike, as what is divine. It is a picture of endless patience, never failing love and constant mercy. This is the kind of treaty partner which human beings yearn for - one which is fair, compassionate and truthful. So, why would we not want to strive to be that kind of treaty partner to others?

This applies in all the partnerships into which we enter. Relationships – legal or more informal, friendships long and short term. It applies when we connect with each other here as whanau or members or associate member, as community. It applies in business, in law, in politics. If we expect politicians to do their part in the political scene, we need to do our part as the electorate. We need to work for a good society, we need to question, make submissions, protest and support, praise when warranted and call for better when needed. We need to forgive when leaders are remorseful and even when they are not. ***We*** need to work for justice for all, not just expect the government to do it for us. That is being a good Treaty partner in the political endeavour.

If we shake hands over a house deal we need to honour that handshake, even if later we might have thought we were a little hasty and might have got a better price another way!

Thank God for people on both side of this Treaty here in Aotearoa New Zealand who have taken great risks to break through different stalemates over the years – who protested, discussed, negotiated, researched, marched, listened, legislated, argued and agreed – those people came from both sides of this treaty at different times.

Even in ancient scripture there is still something to be learned which helps us live better today. The picture of God in the Hebrew Bibleand the Christian Testament describes our dream of how human beings would like to be dealt with, it expresses our yearning for a fair deal and names our hope for mercy when we mess up the deals we made in good faith but did not keep in good faith.

Let us continue to learn this lesson and to follow it in every part of our lives. From the stories of how a divine being might deal with human beings through covenant and Treaty we have been shown how to be faithful to any treaty we or our ancestor might make or have made. Let us then treaty with the others the way we would like them to treaty with us. Susan Jones 027 321 4870 04 909 9612 minister@standrews.org.nz