**St Andrew’s on the Terrace Sunday 25 November 2018. St Andrew’s Day and Suffrage 125.**

**Readings for the Gathering**

**Hebrew Bible Genesis 2: 18 – 22**

**18**The Lord God said, “It is not good for the earth-creature to be alone. I will make a suitable companion.”/ **19**Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the earth-creature to see what the creature would name them; and whatever the earth-creature called each living creature, that was its name. **20**So names were given to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals./ But for the earth-creature no suitable companion was found. **21**So the Lord God caused the creature to fall into a deep sleep; and while the creature slept, took one of the creature’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. **22**Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the earth creature, and he brought her to the man.

**Gospel John 1: 35-42**

**35**The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. **36**When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!”/ **37**When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. **38**Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?”/ They said, “Rabbi”  (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”/ **39**“Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. / **40**Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. **41**The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). **42**And he brought him to Jesus. / Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter).

**Contemporary reading ‘Women’s Suffrage in New Zealand’** by Dr John Tucker

https://www.carey.ac.nz/2018/09/womens-suffrage-new-zealand/

The women’s movement of the late 19th century – first-wave feminism – largely emerged from the churches. The feminist writer, Sandra Coney, acknowledges that “all the prominent early feminists were active Christians.” … Well over half the leading women of the suffragist movement were members of the Women’s Christian temperance Union (WCTU). While

[the suffrage movement] did not begin with the WCTU, that organisation’s activism after 1887 gave huge impetus to the franchise struggle and was crucial to its success.

… the WCTU was strongly Christian in its impulse. Its members were expected to observe “noon-tide prayer,” stopping what they were doing to pray at noon each day. Its vision was profoundly Christian… These women had a broad vision of the Christian gospel. It drove them to evangelism and social action, personal renewal and political reform. Through the activities of the WCTU they played a critical role in the suffrage movement….

**What motivated them?**

… the primary goal of the WCTU was temperance and suppression of the liquor traffic. However, the WCTU’s members were concerned not just with the social harm caused by alcohol… According to Kate Sheppard, the organisation’s objective was to apply “the Golden Rule to the affairs of … civic life.” This meant social action. WCTU members ran soup kitchens, rehabilitated women prisoners in society, aided “fallen women,” operated night shelters, ran nutrition, cooking and sewing classes, and provided pre-school care (which grew into New Zealand’s kindergarten movement).

But the women of the WCTU did not just want to drive the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. They wanted to erect a fence at the top, through political reform. The breadth of their vision was remarkable. At their meetings they debated …: repealing the Contagious Diseases Act (which protected men but not women involved with prostitution), preventing Sabbath desecration, raising the age of consent for sexual activity (to 21), suppressing gambling, equalising the conditions for divorce for both men and women, reducing smoking, and preserving Maori fishing rights on Lake Rotorua. To achieve all these objectives, the WCTU made obtaining suffrage for women a central concern. Political reform would require political action. Women with a social conscience would need to vote.

The suffrage campaign was … motivated by a deep concern for justice and equality between the sexes. In an early issue of the temperance magazine, *White Ribbon*, Kate Sheppard wrote of the “humiliating fact” that there was “one law for man and another for woman.” According to the *Prohibitionist*, lack of the vote implied inferiority, and even suggested that women had no more status than things. In Sheppard’s words, gaining the franchise would allow women to become “persons” at last.

This concern for equality was rooted deeply in Christian theology. Miss H.R. Morrison asserted … in 1892, “Jesus Christ was the first founder and head of the women’s franchise movement. He said that in Him there was neither male nor female in his sight. He considered both sexes equal.” Raewyn Dalziel has argued that the … WCTU were motivated more by a Puritanical moralism rather than by a concern for justice and liberty. But the evidence clearly suggests that justice and liberty were central concerns.

**Reflection for the Gathering**

There are two main qualities about Andrew which stand out in the legends about him. How much are these qualities due to an original person with those actual qualities? To what extent are these characteristics the dream of those who revered him. They are consistent qualities however, and they match the Greek meaning of his name as ‘manly and brave’.

Today’s Gospel reading has a particular version of Andrew joining Jesus band of followers. The writer we call John pictures him as an existing follower of John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin, who had been teaching and preaching repentance and baptism up and down the Jordan river. John points out Jesus as the greater one who is to follow him and Andrew crosses over to see what this new rabbi has to offer. Having checked him out, Andrew’s first act was to bring his brother to Jesus. Ironically it was the brother he brought who became the more famous of the disciples. Simon, later re-named Peter might not have become the rock of the church had his brother not brought him along. They also serve who merely introduce others! Andrew is also named as the intermediary whom Philip approaches to inform Jesus of a group of Greeks interested in this new teacher.

And the other distinctive thing about the Andrew legend which fits with that glimpse of a humble demeanour, is the story of his death – it is said that when he came in his turn to be crucified during the persecution of the early church, he did not think himself good enough to be crucified in the same way as his leader and so asked to be crucified on a diagonal cross - hence the shape of the St Andrew’s cross which is on your order of service and which forms part of the Union Jack collation of crosses. Though Andrew died in the mid to late first century BCE this tradition solidified later during the Middle Ages, so this does sounds more of an aspiration of his followers than a real event. It suggests however, the taking on board of a certain way of being – making the connection with others, a true networker, if you like, and of someone whose role was in the background to serve and not to supercede.

Just as a ‘new thing’ was beginning with Jesus, so in Kate Sheppard’s time of the mid nineteenth century a ‘new thing’ was also happening. The first wave of feminism rallied women to the cause of justice and liberty. For me, Dr John Tucker’s piece on women’s suffrage in New Zealand from the Carey College website makes a startling contemporary reading. New Zealand historians have been taken to task for ignoring the decisive role which Christian women, largely through the Women Christian Temperance Union, played in the gaining of the vote. It is as if there is some cultural cringe at the thought Christian women especially teetotaller evangelical women, had a positive role in our civic and secular life. Yet, if you look at the detail of John Tucker’s piece, you will note that the WCTU, as well as being ‘so religious’ they prayed each noon time, also worked for the good of prostitutes, for equal treatment of men and women in divorce and the preservation of Maori fishing rights – there are more causes on that remarkable list. It is also remarkable (by the way) to note that such a piece was posted on the website of the college which trains Baptist ministers in New Zealand! I didn’t expect that.

I chose the reading from Genesis 2 today to reinforce the statement made by Tucker that that Christian women’s work had its roots in Christian theology. What did he write? ‘Miss H.R. Morrison asserted … in 1892, “Jesus Christ was the first founder and head of the women’s franchise movement. He said that in Him there was neither male nor female in his sight. He considered both sexes equal.”’

The first wave Christian feminists would not have had the benefit of Phyllis Trible’s close reading of Genesis 2 where she points out that the creature we popularly call Adam was in fact not a male differentiated gender but an androgynous earth creature ’adham’ – the name ‘adham’ being a generic word for humankind.

Trible pointed out that man is not created *before* woman but at one point, the undifferentiated earth creature becomes two human beings simultaneously, man and woman. This woman is to be the helper or companion - the word ‘ezer’ or helper does not imply any inferiority at all.

So, when these early feminists of the nineteenth century worked for the equal treatment of men and women they were being more theologically accurate than they could have fully known at the time.

We know a little more factual detail about Kate Sheppard than we do about Andrew, fisherman of the Galilean lake. Kate Sheppard was born in Liverpool to Scottish parents and eventually came out to New Zealand with her mother and brothers to join her married sister in Christchurch in 1869. She married a shop owner who served on the City Council. Her uncle was a Free Church of Scotland minister but she and her family joined the Trinity Congregational church in Christchurch where she taught Sunday school. She joined the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, becoming its national superintendent for franchise and legislation in 1887 and editor of its magazine The White Ribbon. It was when the WCTU joined with other movements for women’s franchise that the suffrage cause received enough support to be successful in petitioning Parliament. After the vote was gained, Kate became the founding president of the National Council of Women in 1896. You have to be a woman of influence to make it on to the NZ $10 note!

A flag for Andrew and a $10 bill for Kate. Two quite disparate people, achieving quite disparate results and reputations. Yet their common belief in the teaching of Jesus led them to lives of dedication to a cause which was about what is right and good and lasting.

A middle eastern fisherman in first century and a Liverpudlian born, Scottish New Zealand gentlewoman of Scottish descent in the nineteenth – who are we in the twenty-first century – men, women, trans and cis, non binary and binary, gay lesbian and bi, intersex and questioning?

Neither Andrew nor Kate lived in times when it was easy to do what they did. Jesus was an unusual addition to the itinerant teaching rabbi circuit. And when the early church began to take shape, Andrew literally gave his life for it along with many others. Kate championed a cause which brought her and her fellow suffragists scoffing and ridicule. I suspect it may have ruined her marriage.

Similarly today it is not easy to be someone who follows a Christian path. The reputation of the Christian church has been tarnished by war and violence and abuse. Our society does not support us taking time out on a Sunday morning for church – lots more entertaining options and Sunday sport are a reality as well as 24/7 shopping opportunities.

Yet, a community such as this one does not appear out of thin air. It is not only our goodwill or our roster participation that makes this place work the way it does. This community benefits as Andrew and Kate did from all those who had gone before them – for Andrew it was the long line of Jewish prophets culminating in John the Baptist and Jesus. For Kate it was those who began and promoted religion in this new country of New Zealand, who had brought the idea of faith to the ends of the earth and those who founded the Temperance Unions to try to combat the devastation alcohol brought to communities of the time. She was a woman of faith, prepared to work for ideals much, much greater than her own needs.

Even if you are chary of relying on a supernatural God ensuring rewards for faithful service, this Christian tradition of which you are part, sitting here today, constantly gives us the resources through which we can do more than we might dream or even think of as individuals. We are given tried and true concepts, the examples of those who have gone before us, the physical and financial resources they have built up over decades, the inspiration of a person like Jesus who showed the way to living for more than just yourself and for making sure that right and good prevail not just for the gentlemen and gentlewomen of society but for all.

There is an important work still to be done of translating these ancient beliefs and principles into a genre which our generation understand and can embrace in these Enlightenment times. Sometimes it distresses me that people in the church do not seem to care about updating and renewing our words and theology or our mode of delivery. Or too that though social action is good and desirable the theological work behind that social action gets lefts behind so that we become just like any other kind of social agency, forgetting the unique aspect we can bring to the world.

And the narrative of the Christian faith with its cast of variable characters reminds us that we do not have to have blind faith in the never-failing goodness of human kind. It teaches us that human beings are fallible, can even be twisted and downright cruel. But it also gives us the example of others: Jesus, Andrew and Kate and her band of women and men who persevered and persisted and prevailed. Thanks to those before us we have the examples of Margaret Mayman and Clare Brockett, Margaret Reid Martin, John Murray, Jack Somerville, Jim Cunningham, Jim Stuart, Pamela Tankersley and Marg Schrader to follow in our time as we gear up for another year at the beginning of Advent next Sunday. Let us give thanks for all who went before and graced the world through the Church’s mission. And let’s pray that we will do so too.

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