

Mountains.

Job 38: 1-7 Matthew 4:1-10

An interesting topic for a service and for a reflection.

Play flute:

I first heard a flute like this being played in the Andes, South America. The sound would travel for miles in the thin mountain air, carried by the wind up from the valleys.

When given this subject for a service I was reminded of the old Scripture in Song, song from my youth.  
Based on psalm 84

How lovely on the mountains are the feet of Him,  
Who brings good news, good news,  
Announcing peace, proclaiming news of happiness:  
Our God reigns, our God reigns!  
Our God Reigns  
Songwriters: Michael W. Smith / Mike Hudson.

It still brings an encouraging smile to my face. The welcoming of good news. Good news of peace and happiness.

And so it is the foundation for this message. To bring good news.

In a time of Delta and Climate change I am called to bring good news.

An old university friend of mine said he felt closest to God when he was up in the mountains. Last time I spoke to him he was still an avid tramper. He said two things took him to the mountains.

One the separation from the city, the farms, and the modified environment. To be at one with nature and oneself. To be in creation and the peace it gives.

But the other was the reminder of how small he was in the grandeur of it all. To stand on a ridge in the Southern Alps and see towering mountains all around.

It is this second image I want to expand on.

The two readings we have had this morning were chosen with that in mind.

Job is a wonderful book. A friend wrote her PhD on it. I must admit I found it too academically dense to read myself but we did talk about it, and it is a real shame that it is so academically dense, that what she concluded cannot be easily read.

My personal connection with Job goes back further, to my university days at Lincoln Collage, when I was learning the science around microbes, plants and animals.

I was learning husbandry, how to maximize the production form farm animals and minimalize the harmful effect of disease.

I was learning the selective breeding of crops an animals  
I was learning about soil and how to supply the critical elements to it in-order to maximize production.

I was learning about planting out step hill country in trees as the best use of this marginal land.

Fertilizers, drenches, stocking rates, Kg's of dry matter.

And the economic system, GDP, marketing, and world trade.

And in the mist of this one day I randomly opened my bible to see what God wanted to say to me. It opened in the Book of Job 38: 1-7. As we had read this morning.

At the time I really did not know what to do with it other than be more attentive to spending time with God.

**I did not relate it to what I was studying.**

But for Job it was a turning point. Being confronted with the reminder of how small he was in relationship with the world around him.

That he did not have the right to demand that everything turns out right for him. But rather to humbly live with the world and his circumstances. That he was part of creation, He did not have power over it. What he needed was to get on with life and stop complaining.

I, on the other hand, continued to learn how creation worked and how I could use the knowledge to transform the land, the Motu into production. I now see that I failed the test, the challenge this passage offered me.

You see I was young and feeding at the 'tree of knowledge', and I ate well.

Who are you to cloud my design in darkness?

I went on learning how to cloud the design in darkness, most of my classmates went on to be farm advisors. They advised farmers to follow this same path. They were on the governments pay role.

All but hunter and gathering communities are 'clouding the design in darkness' (or over heating it as we currently understand it)

This relates to my recent journey into exploring the temptations of Jesus, who like Job and me was confronted with the grander of the whole of creation.

He is first challenged in his own ability to fend for himself. Stone into bread, cannot be done He failed to see that the natural environment is what provides his bread. He said he trusted in God, the God of his ancestors

So secondly his trust in the culture of his God is challenged as he is taken to the top of the temple the panicle of his faith, his culture, He has his trust in the culture of civilization, the temple in Jerusalem, put to the test. He is not willing to put his trust in it but does not admit this but rather uses a politic side step. 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'!

Thirdly he is taken into the wilderness, beyond where he has been before, up a mountain so that he can see beyond the Jordan valley.

He is asked a simple question. Is he prepared to bow down before all the kingdoms of the world in order to gain it?

I think this is the parallel moment of Job being challenged, "Where were you when I lay down the foundations....."

Jesus was being asked to see himself as a part of the whole picture. Not someone who could redraw the picture.

It is interesting that the biblical writers in both these stories credit the Devil as the challenger.

The Devil questions the faith of Job. The devil takes Jesus into the wilderness.

Devil is questioning Jesus's childlike confidence on the civilized world as he knew it.

I have read that in Hebrew Satan means the 'advocate of the alternative', the one who makes the arguments you do not know how to refute.

In the roman catholic tradition the devil's advocate is the one who presents the arguments against the a planned action. As in the sanctification of someone.

I am learning to listen when the devil enters a story. He is there to guide us, to ask the difficult questions.

On the mountain top Jesus was being put in his place. And set on a path towards growing up. He did not get it at the time. But his ministry indicated that he got it later on. He knew the sparrows neither rep of sow....

I did not get it back in my university days when I randomly read Job 38 either. It has taken time for me to brace myself and stand up like a man. To stand at the mountain and truly see all the kingdoms of the world, and be humbled in the face of them.

This is the gift of the mountains.

They are big. And they give us a view that is humbling.

Where were we when the earth foundations were set?  
Do we fully appreciate the all the Kingdoms of the world,  
plant, animal, ocean river forest savanna tundra Mountains  
and plains, microbes, virus even.

This is the first lesson of the mountains. Their power to  
humble. To put us back in our place. To be the devil's  
advocate to our arrogant assumption that we have the right  
to control the world. That it is here for our benefit.

The second gift of the mountains also come with a song  
from my past. One based on Psalm 48

Great is the Lord  
And greatly do we praise him  
In the city of our God in the mountain of his holiness  
Beautiful for situation  
The joy of all the earth.  
Is Mt Zion on the side of the North  
Of the city of our great King

This introduces the significance of Mountains as places of  
hope and safety. As a place to gather. A place to give  
identity. Which is why I chose the song we had played.

When I was first instructed in how to introduce myself on a  
Marae it was with mountain. And for Maori the mountain  
told a lot about a person and their lineage. The mountain

names had a sacred quality. Hikurangi, Toupiri, to walk on  
these places is to walk on sacred ground.

For me the mountain is Hokanui, or East Peak of the  
Hokanui's as it was when I grew up. My mother grew up in  
the lee of the Hokanui. My father grew up with Hokanui to  
the west. And that is where I grew up as well. When we  
could see Hokanui it was going to rain and if we couldn't see  
it, it was raining. Some of my Great uncles made  
moonshine there as well.

When I drive "home" and get near Pukerau, they come into  
view. And I feel at home. I wonder if you have a  
relationship of warmth and connectedness to a mountain?

I have other mountains. The Port Hills have been with me  
four times in my life when I have lived in and around  
Christchurch. They were an anchor, a reference point from  
the plains.

As a chaplain in the Waikato Hospital I often looked out the  
back windows of the hospital at Mt Pirongia. It helped  
ground me after tough encounters, and now I seek it out  
each time I drive north.

This is the soft side of mountain. Where they give a sense of  
place, of grounding. A reassurance that all is well. They are  
permeant. They were there before we were. For me Hokanui  
was there for my parents and my grandparents. And if I had  
remained in the south it would have been there for my  
children and grandchildren. Hokanui was there before  
European, it was there before Maori. And it will be there

long after we are gone if we do not learn the first lesson mountains have to offer.

So the good news of the mountains is that they are there. They are beyond our control. And they stand as a reminder that we are small. And that despite all our grand thinking of our importance in the grand scheme of things we are just one part of the ecology of the world.

But they also bring us comfort. Just as Mt Zion and Mt Saini bring comfort to the Jewish peoples and Taupiri brings connection to Tainui, and Hokanui brings a grounding to me. It is not that any of us think we can control them. It is because they are linked with who we are and where we belong, and they humble us with their permanence.

And so I have this flute. It is a link to the mountains of the Americas. And how lovely it was to hear one like it being played in the Andes.

The mountains around us remind us of our place and they are our comfort. So I will play the flute again. I invite you to reflect on the mountains or landscapes that are important to you and ask what they say to you.