

St Andrews 13/3/22 zoom 'Kings and Prophets' Is 2: 4-5, Lk 13:29-34

A few months ago in October at St Andrews we were blessed with some challenging oratory from our esteemed Supply Minister. Jim gave an outline of the formation of the Hebrew scriptures and that in openly reading their many human life situations we would be unavoidably faced with ourselves.

Moses the earliest great prophet or God spokesman had in a stroke of genius initiated a covenant on behalf of a complaining people intent on returning to the security of Egypt. They would, armed with 10 commandments and new laws choose to struggle and forge a new identity as every new nation state does. They would ever remember their story of escape and victory in song and poetry for centuries to come.

All those independent minded Hebrew prophets who followed would have a forever role in calling the nation back to the integrity of that foundation covenant.

Then in January Ross extended our vision. The world had lost the irrepressible Bishop Tutu followed closely by celebrating Martin Luther King Day. Both were prophets for their time. Institutional racism called out – apartheid dismantled and anti discrimination legislation passed. Like all prophets they addressed the unjust social political issues of the day. In the midst of hopeful signs the reality of racial inequality, violence, tragedy and division sadly continue to be deeply embedded.

A few weeks ago Ben suggested - if I got you sort of right Ben, that one way living culture is passed on is through the stories that we tell each other and in the ones we live by. That new shared stories are needed for us all to adapt and evolve as a cohesive united people. It was Jeremiah the seeming prophet of doom for the Hebrews who was also a prophet of hope with a story for a new age to come.

We conclude that those larger than life independent Hebrew prophets had three main roles. Calling the soon corrupted regime of monarchy and temple back to a proven covenant tradition. Following a religion written on the heart and not on tablets of stone and passing all this on to the next generation.

Secondly, critiquing unjust social structures, beliefs and the politics of the day and thirdly creating new stories of hope to tell each other and to live by for a better future. But note those prophets were not pronosticators, fortune tellers or predictors but realists saying to Kings and people alike if you follow an unjust pathway there will be a negative outcomes and it wont be pretty. Read social division, war, famine, invasion, slavery. Follow then the path to unity and inclusion by every means possible.

No where was this made more clear then by first Isaiah (700 BCE) some 100 yrs

before Jeremiah. The divided kingdom was now a reality with the north taken over by the Assyrians. Isaiah in the style of a progressive imaginative poet was up to the task of calling Judah to its covenant and a lost spiritually genuine tradition. Like many a prophet this likely priest was torn between supporting the corrupt monarchy and temple or obeying his vision.

We read a few verses earlier in a mosaic of colourful description, "I am sick of your sacrifices and solemn assemblies," that is, your hypocrisy, your exploitation of the poor, your preference for war over peace, your racism. It will lead to social division, inequity, idolatry, invasion, violence and death.

But then there is an offer of hope as our familiar verses tell us.

"I will beat your swords into ploughshares and your spears into pruning hooks." And then the beautiful timeless open invitation.

"O house of Jacob, come let us walk
in the light of the Lord."

In other words let us live out a different positive story that we can tell ourselves and our children. One we can repeat day and night along with the commandments and statutes of old.

It has been said, "Kings and politicians govern with the power of prose but real prophets (like Isaiah) inspire with poetry."

We come to the immediate post Jesus period many centuries later. The gospel writers look back trying to make sense of this small town wisdom teacher. A loyal child of the temple he none the less embodied radical interpersonal awareness in whom profound human respect and inclusiveness was encountered.

In true prophetic style he addressed the issues of the day. Race and culture, Jew and Greek, gender, physical illness and class were no barriers to a welcome table. No one was beyond forgiveness and a new start.

This was the Jesus who faced down the legalistic scribes and pharisees and radicalised the 10 commandments into the ethic of 'love your neighbour as yourself.'

It is not surprising the corrupt temple in league with the Romans and their puppet King Herod wanted this young upstart prophet killed.

And so looking back on the crucifixion and amazing post Easter developments of a growing people of 'the way' we find our historian writer Luke is totally enchanted. The divine irresistibly present in the person of Jesus continues to be present in new and life changing ways in the risen Christ. The quoted 'recalled' words of Jesus to Herod have their fitting bitter irony.

"Go tell that fox I am on my way because
it is impossible for a prophet to be killed

outside Jerusalem.”

And then the knowing lament over the destroyed Jerusalem and temple symbolising for Matthew also a forced rapid reset for Judaism. “O Jerusalem --- the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.”

A mediterranean based early church inspired by a startling new idea with new stories to tell itself and the world has begun. This Jesus becomes elevated to 'prophet priest and king'. A new era, a new story full of hope to be lived.

It is this distinctive Judaic Christian story that has become part of our big cultural story, the meta narrative of Christendom. It is the one story we have inherited and continue so tell ourselves - about our origins and our destiny with variations on the details.

It is one story that has served us well, but for many documented years now has been showing real signs of wear. As an explanation for the vast cosmic and human story it is for many inadequate. For a mystical and progressive Christian pathway even more so. For many of us it fails to tick the boxes. Time for new stories to tell ourselves and live by them.

Emerging out of the tragedy and ongoing grief of the Mosque terror attacks there is perhaps something of a new story in the making. Several reports have emerged from those terrifying events.

There was the initial Police Inquest, Then the Royal Commission of Inquiry of Dec 6th 2020 with 44 Recommendations. Then responses to these Recommendations by affected parties and a final legislated Implementation Plan sponsored by the Prime Ministers Dept.

Then just last month the Coronial hearings with a Report now being prepared. Those hearings were in fact so incredibly painful and raw for the Islamic community. The report considers preventative crisis actions not taken and records the physical and emotional trauma and harm to witnesses, whanau and victims including the extent of current ongoing medical interventions.

The response to the Royal Commission's Recommendations were seriously considered by the Justice Ministry and reading them one does get more than a sense of desperation driven to avoid a community outcome that might lead to a future terror event.

The Islamic Women's Council feedback however told another story. They felt unlistened to and disrespected (read victimised by racist attitudes.) They were seeking not to be just consulted but for the Inquiry itself to accept its own mistakes in its gun licensing laws. They requested their own research evidence be accepted regarding the prevalence of white supremacist views, the influence of social media

on creating Islamophobia and institutional and structural racism against mid eastern Asian and Pacific minorities.

The outcome was a July 21, chastened 38 point time - lined Govt Commitment Plan. 3 of these would address the urgency for greater Social Cohesion in our increasing diverse nz population. A new Ministry of "Ethnic Communities" was quickly established with a staff of 30 and with direct accountability to the Cabinet.

The Progress Tracker for this **cohesion** legislation as at the 22 Jan 2022 tells us of the beginning of one new and hopeful story. 4 new specialist minority group case management appointees with funding and resources to implement pilot preschool education, grassroots inclusion hubs for Eastern migrants refugees LGBTQ+, Pacific and other minorities. All starting in in Akld and here in Wgtn.

The ministry's first Jan publication Kaiakaka a Oranga Panui indicates the level of seriousness that Islamic and other voices has been taken. It seems the govt has got it.

Their assumption, the projected story of alienation. anger, community dislocation to negative ideologies can be avoided.

That deliberate inclusive efforts alongside impacted minority ethnic communities will lead to new levels of **social cohesion**. A new unity in diversity. New hopes realized new aspirations achieved leading to lives changed by new stories to live by.

Maybe the Royal Commissions Report and the follow up process and a new ministry is a prophetic outcome or at least a visionary outcome? You may respond with derision considering the fate of many Inquiries. Time will tell.

We as a Church with others of course are stake holders in this new story, this cohesion mahi.

A final story. In preparation for this service I spoke to my friend of the Wgtn Abrahamic Council and called the Ministers Association for the Taihape region. Their local Islamic centre, was opened over five years ago. It is one of these small centres which continues to impact on local residents on attitudes and not least their theology.

Ad deen Mosque was advertised as the highest in nz, A place to rest and pray for travellers. Yes, some of the churches did give practical support to transform the old Tui St shop.

Yes, they have supported the local associated restaurant. And yes as we have personally done supported the Taihape motels and so the Islamic extended family

who some 3 yrs ago purchased them.

And yes, the churches funded the Mosque leader and his wife to travel to ChCh after March 15th.

And yes, following a prompt the churches will take a pastoral initiative with the Mosque this week in view of the anniversary and stress of the Coronial report hearings.

Perhaps all signs of a small new cross cultural and religious awareness, one new story of cohesion building we can tell ourselves. sidelining and challenging the other negative ones we know so well.

We do need prophets who respect the best of our cultural/religious heritage, addressing justice issues of the day and can see in the Jesus spirit new hopeful stories to live our lives by and so know that we are all truly connected in one mosaic of colour.

David Douglas

Laura couldn't be here with us today, but I said I would read her reflection for her.

She retells the experience of three widows who lost their beloved husbands in the Christchurch Terror Attacks.

Jaman Neha

Mhubo Ali Jama and

Hamimah Tuyan.

Light in darkness: grief, healing and transformation

Three women expressed their pain of loss and grief, but at the same time their experience of faith in their Creator, as the healer in their lives, after losing their loved ones on the 15th of March 2019 in Christchurch.

Fifty-one people were killed when they were kneeling in prayer.

In the Muslim tradition that means that they were martyrs, as they died in a pure state, the state of prayer which is called *shuhada*.

The Christchurch massacre left so many lives in pieces.

Here are some testimonials from the widows of Shuhada who were all in a similar path of pain, acceptance, and deepening faith. A path that was laid down by March 15.

One significant event that helped them to rebuild their lives was the fact that the widows went on the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

There they got comfort, strength, and hope in their lives. Broken lives that needed to be glued together by love and faith in humanity.

Jaman Neha from Bangladesh passed her days without knowing what was going to happen next.

She was like a pendulum, swinging backwards and forwards.

Sometimes she stayed crying in her dark bedroom and at other times she got up and said that she would need to be strong for her daughter.

Yes, her daughter was born five months after the Christchurch attacks.

Her husband Omar Faruk was killed in a state of prayer, and he would never hold his little baby in his arms.

Neha kept thinking what would happen when her daughter grew up and would ask about her baba. What answer would she give her later?

Why had Allah taken her husband's life away?

Sometimes she got angry at Allah and asked Him infinite questions with no answers.

Muhubo Ali Jama from Somalia used to drive her car everywhere and since the massacre she stopped because if she heard a slight bang, she would be scared.

She lost her husband of 25 years, Sheik Muse who used to teach Koran to the young adults and children of the Muslim community. She used to be happy, but now she felt depleted.

The Christchurch massacre opened old memories from her past experience of the civil war in her own country in the 1980s. There she got a head injury which affected her memory.

So during the Friday massacre she was inside the mosque with other women. She heard the gun shots and she saw dead bodies and witnessed the long suffering of people dying at the mosque. That brought her trauma back from the past.

When she was able to talk after being many months in silence and being in isolation at home, she expressed her deep sorrow and she

thought that she wanted to pass away. Her life had been around Sheik Muse her loving husband and without him, life had lost a significant meaning for her.

Another widow who was listened to **Muhubo** talking, said to her, *“but you did not die, perhaps there was a message in that”*.

Muhubo was there at the mosque during the shootings, she heard some screaming, she saw the ambulances, she was soothing others who were impacted.

However, being part of the group of widows in which they shared their stories helps **Muhubo** to feel compassion and deep empathy for **Neha** who is a solo mother and a widow and has no family around for support.

Hamimah Tuyan from Singapore lost her husband Zekerija Tuyan after he had battled for more than 40 days before succumbing to his injuries.

Those 40 days held hope but also acceptance of the Plan that her Creator had for them.

For her the meaning of losing her husband is greater than losing the breadwinner.

For her and her community, she lost their Iman, their leader, their companion, the loving father for her two boy children of 10 and 5 for whom they had big dreams. Her children would not have him, Zekerija to lead them by example.

When **Hamimah** went on the Hajj, she said that she came from a place that witnessed the detrimental impact which bigotry, ignorance and hatred could have in her community, to a gathering where people come together from various parts of the world and regardless their colour, race, culture, status or social class.

So for her doing the Hajj pilgrimage gave her a new sense of purpose and sort of closure.

She added that her faith played a significant role in her healing journey.

She found consolation in the words of her Prophet: *“no fatigue, no disease, no sorrow, no hurt, no sadness, no stress can weaken your faith; even Allah cannot burden you more than you can bear”*.

So He chose her husband, one among the 51, and He chose her to go through this learning journey and would uplift her if she would patiently persevere.

Their voices came unanimously together to say that, although there might be some people who could be called racist, they had the urgent need to spread love and teach their children from an early age the beauty of diversity.

That it is absolutely fine if you look different, if you have different beliefs or your colour is different or you wear different things round your hair, it is all fine because at the end of the day we are all human.

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Well, we have heard these stories of the four widows of *shuhada*.

Their stories were condensed from a total of 9 hours of programmes by RNZ between September 2019 and August 2020.

After listening to the stories of these heroines, do you feel the same person?

Which story touched you the most?

Did you feel out of your comfort zone?

Did these stories help you to change your perception of the Christchurch massacre?

Did these stories help you to understand pain and suffering but also hope?

Perhaps we can take some thoughts as spiritual seeds home for this period of lent.

We can reflect in silence on how we could grow more in tune with compassion for ourselves and for others and in harmony by recognising our common humanity.

I would like to finish with an excerpt from Hafiz, the sufi Persian lyric poet from the 14th century:

*I have come into this world to see this: the sword drop from men's
hands even at the height of their arc of anger
Because we have finally realised there is just one flesh to wound
and it is His—the Christ's, our Beloved's*

Shalom, Peace, Salaam Aleikum