

Moana Sermon 18th August 2022

By Rev Dr Fei Taule'ale'ausumai

When I was in Tuvalu in 2016, I was invited by the President of Ekalesia Tuvalu church to travel with him to 5 islands in the 8-island archipelago. Every one of these islands had a church on it some old and some new foundations. The populations of these small islands numbered in their hundreds many of whom were youth and children. I also had the opportunity to visit Kiribati and Christmas Island (not the Australian Christmas Island) but the Kiribati island you must travel to via Fiji. The population of Christmas Island is about 800 people who are the children born on that island to parents who were sent there from Kiribati to test the atom bombs for the British. There is nothing there hardly any vegetation, nothing grows there so all their food is imported, they exist there with their second and third generation children. I also went to Nauru and visited the detention centre that we pray about every Sunday among other places. Many of the native Nauru islanders are marrying some of the people from the detention centre so there are multi-faith families emerging in the population. These islands are just tiny specks in the ocean and extremely vulnerable. These small island nation people are climate change victims.

At one time about 20 years ago in Kiribati the church's voice shouted to the people to have faith and remember God's promise to Noah of the rainbow. Their theology told them from the pulpit that God promised no more floods, the rainbow was a covenant that God would no longer send floods to the earth to destroy the people and so no action against climate change was necessary. The churches were preaching a contradictory message to the reality of science. Today, the churches are now pro-active in teaching climate change and rising sea levels and looking at ways of planting more mangroves and building higher sea walls among other things. For Pacific Island nations who are 99% Christian, it is crucial that the clergy

preach reality from their pulpits instead of pie in the sky eschatological theology which keeps the people ignorant and vulnerable. The church has a huge responsibility to open its eyes and ears to climate change and its impending threat on its people and nation.

The Moana is often taken for granted. For Pacific people, Oceanians, Moana is our home. It is our root and the stronghold of life. We claim the great Moana as a place where we live, move, and find our beings.

Inevitably however, Moana is constantly being violated of her own integrity.

There is much about the ocean which is unknown. At the same time, so much of the life of the ocean shapes each island and continent. The *moana* through its waves and currents touches all the coastal waters which connect the life on the land with the ocean depths. On one hand the life of the *moana* is a mystery, but on the other, *moana* embraces and impacts closely on life on land.

Moana is about a powerful living presence. In many parts of Oceania, *Tangaloa* was revered as the god of the *moana*. A reverence for *Tangaloa* meant respect for the abundant resources of the *moana* and the harvesting of the resources, so that fishing of certain species was restricted to certain seasons to allow the breeding and growth of fish. Before a tribe departed on a journey, for warfare or on a fishing expedition for the wellbeing of the community, the name of *Tangaloa* was evoked. When the tribe returned safely and victoriously, the conch heralded good news.

The *Moana* has been regarded as a pathway to eternity. Ancient people of the *moana* believed the spirit lives after death. In Samoa and Tonga and some other parts of Oceania, Pulotu, a haven for the spirits, was thought to be found in the eastern part of Oceania - the east relating to the sunrise. Here in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Tangata whenua believe that the spirits of the dead leapt off Cape Reinga at the tip of the North Island on their way to their home in Hawaiki.

The pioneering Polynesians who between 3-4000 years ago set out in their *vaka* – double-hulled canoes - across the vast ocean were enormously courageous and skilful. They

navigated the vast tracts of water which we now know as the Pacific Ocean. This was the ocean they knew and which shaped their thinking and their culture, their beliefs. The *Moana* was *the* ocean which we know covers more than seventy percent of the water of the surface of planet earth .

The Pacific Ocean constitutes nearly half of the ocean water on this planet. It is the deepest. It was named Pacific because of its perceived peacefulness. At the same time, the Pacific Ocean, as we know, experiences the turbulence of cyclones, tsunami, and active volcanoes. The Atlantic Ocean is younger than the Pacific. The vast continental shelf is an extension of the surrounding nations and huge rivers flowing into the Atlantic provide rich nutrients for many species from within and from different oceans. Mineral resources are abundant. The Indian Ocean with its diverse currents contributes powerfully to the rhythm of the flowing movement and inter-connecting of one ocean to another. The Antarctic Ocean is known for its gusty winds and high seas and as a polar region, it provides a home for certain important species that live nowhere else. The Arctic Ocean is exposed to six months of darkness and six of sunlight and also provides a home for some living species. The Pacific Ocean, which is the largest ocean, is not independent of the Arctic Ocean, the smallest. Each ocean has unique contributions to complement the life of other oceans. Each flows freely into other oceans and together they provide a home for the majority of species on this planet earth and produce half of the oxygen living beings need, and they interact powerfully with the sun and moon and the stars. They gift the climate and water for life and growth of all.

Moana as an identity for people in Oceania is an expression of an important and conscious shift of emphasis. The name Pacific as an identity for our region was coined by outsiders and is synonymous with the scattered small islands, helplessness, isolation, and dependence. As a result of this same mindset, our region has been transformed into a tourist heaven, a romanticised perpetuation of dependence on the multi-national corporations now under the umbrella of globalisation. *Moana* in terms of theology is an attempt by our own people to take ownership of our own life, struggles and hope. The change of name from Pacific to *Moana* is a shift with a sacramental emphasis. The multi-island states

of *Moana* (Oceania) are unique not in terms of smallness and scatteredness, but rather in their interconnectedness. The *Moana* is the great source of our interconnectedness. The following YouTube video clip is from the island of Kiribati.

Watch you tube clip on Kiribati.

- Halapua Winston Moana Methodology. Talanoa Oceania.