

St Columba, second Sunday after Pentecost: Te Pouhere Sunday

Acts 10:34-43

Luke 6:46-49

Theme: Foundations

It's a bit scary standing here before you for the first time! We don't really know each other yet. You will have expectations of me either because of what you have heard, or simply because I am the new woman around the place and you are waiting for something to happen! And I have expectations of you mainly on account of what I have read in your Parish Profile! So there is a bit of 'shaking down' to do as they say, a time when we will get to the heart of who we are and who we can become.

I was very pleased that today, as well as being my first Sunday with you, is also the day set aside in our Anglican Calendar to celebrate the three tikanga church that we are part of: Te Pouhere. One of the things that you will get to know about me is that core to my theology is being inclusive and hospitable. It translates into working together across all differences – cultural , gender, economic and age – to understand how we can live well together as communities in this land. The Anglican three tikanga structure that we celebrate today enables Maori, Pacific and Pakeha, differences in being church to be expressed. It is a great foundation for building commitment to one another on.

Every morning on my walk, I pass a house that is having extensive rebuilding work done on it. It is an old villa that had got pretty run down.

There were still people living in it until a few weeks ago despite its dilapidated state.

There are some lovely flowers in the garden around the house and a great covered veranda that catches the morning sun, and even some rather fine stained glass windows...

But the rest was pretty rough; peeling paint, uneven floor boards, a slope on the veranda and missing weather boards in places.

Since the residents moved out the builders have 'moved in'. They have immediately stripped off the basement casing and revealed to those of us who pass by the joists and foundations on which the house has been sitting. Well...I guess the odd brick here and there on the clay are what must once have been called 'foundations' along with the spindly, rickety bits of timber that seem to sit on the bricks!

I have to say when all this was revealed to me I wondered why the house had not slipped down the hill long ago! Clearly it was not going to stand much longer! I wonder if the residents over the years knew how precariously sited their dwelling was.

There is a lot of this sort of work going on today; rebuilding. It all seems to involve the stripping back of cladding that has been added over years, in order to reveal what is beneath.

That is what the Te Mihinare O Aotearoa did back in the late 1980s when it stripped back its cladding and had a look at the foundations we were building the future Anglican Church in NZ on. The three tikanga church emerged out of that examination, as an earnest desire to do something to recognise the role and expectations of Maori for a respectful honest partnership in relation to people and land and their response to the Gospel. When the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840, they thought they were getting such a respectful partnership, one that would enable respectful hospitality to Tauwiwi: people from over the sea. The Treaty is the foundational document, a covenant that sets out those dreams and expectations for Aotearoa NZ as one nation with diverse peoples.

The three tikanga church structure is a structure that is more securely fixed in the soil of this land, and therefore a more reliable foundation to take us into an inclusive hospitable future. The three tikanga church constitution puts in place some new planks in the foundation of church. This strengthened foundation will enable us to cope with any renovations and additions we might want to make as we accommodate to the changes of today's world.

It is no surprise, then, that the lectionary readings set for today include the Luke reading of the wise man who built his house on rock, on good foundations.

We all like to think we are like that: with our foundation firm and secure – on rock, like that of Jesus' 'wise man'. If nothing else this reading is an invitation to us (or perhaps a challenge) to dare to have a look at the foundations that our personal Christian commitment and our ministry here at St Columba are built on. It could be a scary invitation; we might not like what we discover. We may discover that we are precariously perched and that our foundations need some attention! Nevertheless I am suggesting it is a task for us to do together over the first couple months of our new relationship. It will give us the opportunity to reassure ourselves that we are secure, and well founded for whatever we want to do in the next few years.

You will notice that the Gospel reading begins with a challenge: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I tell you?” it sounds to me as though Jesus was getting a bit cross!

It seems to me that he is saying that if we really hear what he is talking about we will not only listen, but our lives and attitudes will be changed and *we will do something!* We will ensure that we are well founded in faith and have an understanding of what is expected in order to proclaim the Good news of God.

In the verses of chapter 6 around this text, there are stories and examples of behaviours that illustrate Jesus’ teaching and they even include the one about him breaking a traditional religious law because it did not serve the needs of people who were struggling financially! Always Jesus is concerned to feed, to heal, to include, to love; in other words to restore ‘community’ so it functions in the best interests of all its members.

These stories are pointers as to what can be done to proclaim the Good news of God seen in Jesus.

We need to act in ways that have similar outcomes today.

To do that we need to make sure we have secure foundations.

If we put it all another way, *those of us who would be ‘wise’ will endeavour to be genuinely concerned for those in society who are in need - economically, spiritually, emotionally;* we will want to work to bring peace and health and wellbeing to their situation, as well as to our own interpersonal relationships.

In the various communities we are part of we will want to behave in ways that make relationships as good as possible, and we will do all this without thinking we are better than anyone else. *Why will we do these things if we are wise?*

Because

- Our faith is in the love of God, and these are the attitudes to life and the ways of living that express that love; that express the restoration of ‘right relations’ and are foundational expressions of God’s love. And,
- These are the behaviours that will ensure the future of the human community and the earth that sustains it: concern for others and their wellbeing, and not just those who are like us, culturally or socially or intellectually makes for a more respectful and just world.

These are the things we are expected to do ...but, are our Christian foundations secure enough to sustain and support the attitudes and actions that follow? This is what we will need to explore. *Wisdom is not just knowing about these things, it is also doing because we know we must – for the love of God.*

The house that I walk past now has concrete blocks and steel girders supporting it. Materials not available when it was first constructed! It is clear that the builders are planning for the structure to house families for many more years and to cope with the changes that these families may require.

And here in St Columba Grey Lynn - What are the foundations you have laid personally, and as a community? Will they sustain alteration and renovation as we move into a different future?

I am hoping the foundations are firm enough to bear the weight of the challenging task that you have set yourself, and me, in being a progressive Christian community actively engaged with the neighbourhood. I like the sound of that very much. I believe such a vision will enable us to pay attention to other communities, and to offer hospitality to those who are different from us – as well as to care for each other and this community.

I trust we will want to do these things in ways that re-present the Gospel of God, through Jesus, in today's language, images and appropriate actions.

We have Gospel foundations to build on, we need to care for these foundations, you and I – to strengthen them and restore them where necessary – to add new materials available today that were not available when we first committed ourselves to the story of Jesus. Here at St Columba, we need to have a look beneath the cladding that has covered our foundations and reassure ourselves they are firm enough to carry us forward with wisdom.

I invite you to look with me over the next few weeks at some of those foundations that can support our Christian journey in today's complex world.