



Rev Diana Rattray
*Setting our gaze beyond the world,
as we perceive it.*

Sun in OT
Year C Ordinary 32
Job 19: 23-27a
Luke 20: 27-38

6 November 2022

Yesterday amidst the bangs and the flashes of fireworks our nation should have been remembering the events of that day at Parihaka, rather than a treason plot on the British parliament.

On 5 November 1881 amalgamated troops came into the peaceful resistance at Parihaka, in the shadows of Mt Taranaki. The troops were greeted by children singing. Fresh bread had been baked and was given to those carrying arms. The response was to arrest the Maori men, to plough the crops into the ground and destroy the fences. Unspeakable acts of violence occurred towards the women and children. All in response to peaceful resistance to the confiscation of tribal land. 70 years before the peaceful resistance of Mahatma Gandhi there was peaceful resistance at Parihaka.

Lest we forget.

As we get closer to Advent, our readings become more apocalyptic, there is talk of end times and predictions of when and how this might occur. A challenge for us to set our gaze beyond the world as we see it. In today's gospel from Luke, Jesus and the Sadducees discuss life and death issues connected to the resurrection. We know that there were fundamental disagreements between the Pharisees and Sadducees over this key Jewish theological matter.

Jesus was on the journey towards Jerusalem and the cross. As his reputation increased so did resistance to him and his teaching. Jesus' encounter with the Sadducees over this matter is fascinating or ridiculous depending which way you look at it. The Sadducees were a group made up of priestly and aristocratic families. They didn't believe there was a life after death, and so it was therefore more important to them that their name and family would live on in this world, through their children. The example they give of a woman being married to seven brothers in turn is absurd. If today's gospel reading was a real story in the family violence sector in 2022 the first question that would be asked is what is the woman doing to cause the death of all her husbands? In the medical sector it may be looking at hereditary illnesses that are causing the probable infertility, and the deaths of all the brothers in that family. In reality the Sadducees are trying to make fun of the idea of resurrection.

The concept of an afterlife, or resurrection, was shared by the Pharisees and Jesus. Those who did not hold those views were trying to trick Jesus so that he would have to commit himself to his teaching on resurrection life. It is most likely an attempt to reinforce their religious position at the expense of this man who is getting more people gathering around and listening to his ideas. Yet Jesus is not going to enter into game playing.

Instead he provides a clear argument in favour of resurrection. He knows his time is limited and there are some key concepts that he would like his followers to understand. We don't hear the Sadducees response to Jesus' answer. What is provided is real insight and guidance on a matter that was controversial and divisive. In the first testament reading Job tells of his confidence that although he thought that God was against him he had faith and fervently believed that in the end God would be on his side.

His faith and belief was so strong that he was one of the first to talk about the resurrection of the body, which was not a well-developed doctrine in Israel at the time Job was writing. His confidence rings out in the words – I know that my Redeemer lives. Jesus described himself as the 'Resurrection and the life', and the breadth of

understanding of what that means can still lead to a variety of interpretations.

What we can hear from the reading is that Jesus' teaching about salvation is as much about the living here and now as it is about the new life lived after death. How we choose to live now is dependent on how fully we live in faith alongside each other. Yes the resurrected life may be a changed experience.

What is most of concern to us now, is how we live in a way that follows Jesus' examples. When we do that we can glimpse the realm of God here on earth. We can see and experience a world bigger than the one we see from our own perspective.

That is what was happening at Parihaka. Te Whiti o Rongomau had a deep love of the scriptures he had been schooled in. At missionary school Te Whiti developed a wide-ranging and deep knowledge of the Bible and could quote large sections by heart. The Bible was his constant companion, the single most important influence on his life. He not only read and learnt the scriptures he choose to live out the way he understood them. At Parihakia Te Whiti, with his fellow leader Tohu Kakahi, set up a unique community. Instead of the usual fortified village, Te Whiti created an open village on the banks of the Waitotoroa. The layout was carefully planned, the economy and agriculture were efficiently managed, the young were educated and there was a focus on sanitation and health measures. Alcohol was forbidden. Te Whiti was a man with mana and charisma, an orator who preached to his people love and forgiveness. He also modelled it in the way the troops were greeted and subsequently when he was arrested and during his imprisonment.

Heaven and earth are not so dissimilar if lived in a fully Christ like manner. As we move into the Great Thanksgiving, we come in all our vulnerability before God. We remember God-with-us as we face opposition, as we are compromised because of who we are, what we stand for, or what we believe.

We commit ourselves to looking to live the way Christ and the gospels, the good news teach us. So that we, like Te Whiti, live in peace, to love and trust and hope whatever the circumstances of life.

When we eat the bread and drink the wine we recall Jesus' faithfulness when life tested him and we draw hope and courage from him and from all people who allow the Spirit of Love to be stronger than violence, or cynicism or despair.

Later this week is Armistice Day. It is a day when we celebrate peace declared at 11am on the 11th day of the 11th month in 1914. As we focus on peace not war, love not hate, light, not dark we hold on to the ways peace is proffered in 2022.

I finish with words of Te Whiti to his followers: "Go. Put your hands to the plough. Look not back. If any come with guns and swords be not afraid. If they smite you, smite not in return. If they rend you, be not discouraged. Another will take up the good work."¹ So may it be. Amen.

¹ FATS Full Bio Version 2 vols Rev2 as at 30May19.pdf pp782-3