**Talking About the Treaty**

**A Sermon for Cashmere Presbyterian Church**

**Sunday 16th June 2024**

**Preacher: Very Rev Hamish Galloway**

**Texts:** Micah 6:6-8 & John 13:31-34

**Introduction**

Last Sunday we talked about how the people of Israel in the 11th century BC asked Samuel to give them a king and the implications of that for our lives and our nations. This scripture, 1 Samuel 8, is actually deeply imbedded in our national story.

Just as the tribes of Israel discerned the need for a king to consolidate them and lead them in the face of external threats, in the late 1850s and early 1860s the Māori tribe of Aotearoa discerned the need for a king to consolidate them and lead them in the face of external threats. Alarmed by shoddy land deals that broke the Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840, the Māori king movement grew up, the principal object being the preservation of their lands by a mutual compact that no more shall be sold or taken without the consent of the king and his council. And the ethos behind this was scriptural. By 186, most Māori in NZ professed Christian faith and the missionaries were prominent in protecting Māori against the encroachments of land-hungry white settlers.

The respected Chrisitan chief, Wiremu Tāmihana, was a prime mover in the king movement. He contended that it was not just a way of protecting land and the manna of the Treaty, but was a way of securing peace in the wake of squabbles over land. In 1857, speaking to a gathering of 800 at Taupo, he commenced his speech by quoting 1 Samuel 8:5 “Give us a king to judge us.”

This newly formed king movement did not go down well with the NZ Land Company, nor the then Governor Gore Browne, both of whom saw it as directly hostile to their ambitions for land. This sentiment was, in part, a reason behind the shocking land wars of the early 1860s. and with that came a huge disillusionment of the Māori people with Christianity. In the words of Bishop Selwyn, our congregations ‘melted away”. Norman Etherington puts it this way:

*By 1860 Christian missions had been operating in New Zealand for more than forty years and were widely recognised as among the most successful on earth. Virtually the whole of the Māori population professed the Christian religion, inter-tribal warfare had largely ceased, and missions had been prominent in defending Indigenous inhabitants against encroachments by land-hungry white settlers. Within five years these achievements were called into question as large sections of the North Island were convulsed by war.*

At the heart of the problem, it seems to me, was a sense of betrayal because the Treaty signed in 1840, te Tiriti O Waitangi, was being severely breached.

This remains highly relevant and topical for us today. It is 184 years since the signing of the Treaty, yet it is so topical today with Act’s Treaty Principles Bill up for debate, surging protests in response, and strong rhetoric from all sides of the argument.

My key question today is, should we be talking about this in our churches? And I have come to the resounding answer – yes, we should! My hesitations were along the lines of: this is too controversial and divisive; what do I know about this?; isn’t this politics, not religion? But my hesitations were overcome in listening to a talk by Alistair Reese at the Transitional Cathedral a few weeks back. Alistair is an historian and theologian. He gave an inspirational speech at the Waitangi church service on Waitangi Day this year (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXYxhiacKu4>). As a result of that he was asked to speak here in Christchurch and, on a cold Tuesday night, the Cathedral was packed with people eager to hear more! He convinced me that we need to be talking about this in the church – he gives 2 main reasons:

1. The central role of the church in the origins, drafting and signing of the Treaty, and
2. The clear Christian covenantal ethos behind the Treaty for both Māori and missionary.

He said that, while the Treaty is often spoken of as between the Crown and Māori, this leaves out a main player, the Christian church. We, as the church, have a moral responsibility to stay in the conversation because of our instrumental involvement at the very beginning.

And so I talk about it today! But with a huge disclaimer – this is a big and controversial topic and I do not pretend to be an expert. But Reese has spurned me to read and read over the last week as I prepared for this. And what I say now is my take on it, and hopefully inspires you to read, think and converse!

So, let’s take up Reese’s 2 reasons for the church’s involvement, and to that I will add 2 more of my own.

1. **Church and Treaty**

There are a number of elements to this:

1. Concern for Māori people in the wake of European immigration, a hunger for land, and colonialist ideology. There was a very genuine desire by the missionaries to put in place protection for the Māori people. And so a key idea at the time of the signing was Māori obtaining the crown’s governing protection at the same time as they retained power, ‘tino rangateratanga’, over their lands, estates, forests and fisheries.
2. The main framer of the Treaty was Sir James Stephen, a member of the Clapham Sect in England. The Clapham Sect was a wonderful group of influential evangelical Christians in England who combined their vibrant Chrisitan faith with a desire for social justice and the transformation of society. A key member was William Wilberforce, and MP who was a major player in the abolition of slavery in Britain. Sir James Stephen brought the social justice lens of the Clapham Sect to bear on the drafting of the Treaty. Whereas in other countries colonisation had often resulted in the subjugations of indigenous peoples, he wanted a treaty that protected Māori against this.

So that was behind the drafting, but the church was also incredibly instrumental in the signing. Henry Williams, the influential missionary, had the trust of the Māori chiefs and he was very involved in the signing, assuring the chiefs that this was good for them and would protect their rights. And it was Henry who translated the Treaty into Māori, something that has been hugely controversial over the years because of his use of the word tina rangatiratana – Te Papa has this to say about this: “*The Maori version of the Treaty gives the crown, kawanatanga kotoa, complete governorship and guarantees tino rangatiratanga to Māori, that is unqualified exercise of chieftainship over their lands, dwelling places and all other possessions.”* Te Papa goes on to say that “these different promises do not sit alongside each other easily.”

Certainly, this element of the Treaty has been most controversial, with the Māori version giving Māori stronger rights. Some in the past have accused Henry Williams of deliberately misleading Māori, but subsequent research has tended to strongly support the position that he had the interests of Māori at heart, and the problems here stem from difficulty with translation, finding words in each language that equate.

1. **World View and Theology**

The second reason for us to take a serious interest is to do with the worldview and theology each party brought to this. While the Crown was coming at this from a primarily legal and constitutional perspective, the missionaries and Māori definitely overlayed this with the ideas surrounding saved covenant.

The idea of covenant is deeply imbedded in scripture from the time of creation to the times of Noah, Abraham, and Moses. And then, in Jesus, we have a new covenant, sealed with his blood, a covenant based on the command “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

In his speech at Waitangi this year, Alistair Reese relates how, on the night of 5th February 1840, after a day of heated debate, the chiefs gathered to discuss amongst themselves the Crown’s proposal. Henry Williams joined them and told them “This [Treaty] is Queen Victoria’s act of love to you. She wants to ensure that you keep what is yours – your property, your rights and privileges, and those things you value.”

Williams certainly saw a divine hand in the Treaty and it was understood by many Māori, now deeply committed to Christian thinking, as a covenant. The first signatory, Hone Heke, exclaimed: “It is ever the word of God” and he likened the Treaty to the revelation of God’s love for his creation.

So, for these 2 main players in the signing of the Treaty, there was strong Christian spiritual underpinning, a very significant reason for we Christians to stay in the conversation.

There is a third reason for us to stay engaged:

1. **Broken Covenant**

There is no doubt that the Treaty has been broken repeatedly buy the Crown over the years. The land grab and land wars of the 1850s and 1860s were early and deeply disturbing examples. The Treaty Resource Centre had identified 29 examples of central government breaches dating from 1841 to the present day. The Waitangi Tribunal has repeatedly acknowledged breach after breach and is working on redress for Māori. Perhaps one of the saddest breaches was talk in the 19thcentury of the Treaty as null and void, in the words of Alistair Reese “breaches included the Crown dismissing the Treaty as a simply nullity and worthless because it was signed between a civilised nation and a group of savages.”

Breaching covenantal promises are familiar to we Christians – the scriptures are littered with examples of humanity breaking covenants with God! And time and again God is merciful and adapts and renews the covenantal relationship, culminating in the new covenant sealed in the blood of Christ. This is another reason for we Christians to be involved!

1. **Renewing the Covenant**

We understand broken promises, repentance, forgiveness and new beginnings. That understanding is so important in the present conversation, given 184 years where there had been constant breaking of the covenant.

Along the way there have also been times of renewal. A beautiful example was in 1934 when the Governors General, Lord Bledisloe, gifted the house and land where the Treaty was signed back to the nation. He called the Treaty a Tatau Pounamu, the doorway to reconciliation, and then he prayed “O God, grant that this sacred compact here made in these waters might be faithfully and honourably kept for all times to come.” At the opening of the gifted building Sir Apirana Ngata attested to the Treaty’s resurrection life with a haka with the words “it was dead and now it lives.”

As Christians we need to look for and promote these times of Treaty covenant renewal. I wonder if the revival of te reo, Māori language, is an example of this. I see how te reo slips effortlessly off the tongues of my grandchildren and think, in time to come, Māori names for our institutions will be simply celebrated rather than become the object of moans from us old whit baby boomers!

**Conclusion**

For these 4 reasons we Christians and our churches so surely need to be engaged in this Treaty conversation, bringing to it our heritage of covenantal care for the bi-cultural partnerships of our land, Aotearoa NZ!