



Te Pouhere Sunday
Rev Cate Thorn

Year A, Te Pouhere Sunday
Isaiah 42:10-12, 16; John 17: 6-8, 17-26
11 June 2023

Today is Te Pouhere Sunday, designated by General Synod as the day on which we celebrate our life as a Three-Tikanga church.

‘Pouhere’, it is a composite word made up of the Maori words, ‘pou’ and ‘here’. The word ‘pou’ can mean a post, a pillar, an upright or column. It is always a positive image. It implies firmness and authority and has connotations of uprightness, strength and safety. The word ‘here’ can mean to tie, bind, unite, secure or knot. It is a more ambivalent image than ‘pou’ for although it is used to describe the bindings of a canoe, or the binding between ancestors, people and land, it is also used to describe imprisonment. ‘Here’ brings with it a sense of obligation or accountability.

Let us consider Te Pouhere Sunday. This is a day we mark the strength of that which binds us, celebrate our changed constitution that declares we’re a three-tikanga church. It is 31 years since this change, does Te Pouhere Sunday remind us of our binding together or has it come to seem it’s holding us in bondage to one other?

In any binding there’s a necessary tension, for the purpose of binding is to hold something together against resistant forces that would seek to break it apart. Whether we consider the bindings of a canoe, held together against the forces of water and weather, the binding of a people to each other and to their land against invasion,

alienation and loss of identity, or the binding of a person in prison against forces of disorder and lawlessness. Each binding creates tension and containment.

But look, you may think, if we got rid of, or didn't have the resistance then we wouldn't need the binding. Still, the effect of resistance is to stimulate change, and change can lead to growth, and growth to new life. So perhaps if we **trust** the tension of our binding, and **resist** those forces that would seek to divide us, we **will be able together** to change and grow and come to new life.

I wonder how we regard the change to our constitution. How many of you even remember that we have a changed constitution that names we're part of a three-tikanga church? Maybe we see this three-tikanga church idea as something that was dreamed up by head office and changed. It really makes no difference to us. But **is** it something artificially imposed, or does it name something that already existed?

By way of example, let's think about the idea of faith. Tradition claims that, through grace, we're restored and aligned in relationship with God. Becoming aware of this we may choose to act differently. As we act differently do we have a lingering sense we're working to earn or justify such grace? Or do we act out of a deep thankfulness for grace freely given? In our journey of faith do we have a sense we're working to earn a reward or that we're growing in understanding, acceptance and embrace of grace? Is grace something imposed we still have to work out or are we able to accept it is the way things are?

This may flow into our life as a community of faith. Today's gospel proclaims, "I have given them the glory you gave me that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be made perfect in unity. Then the world will know that you sent me

and that you loved them as you loved me.” The glory of God then is that we may be as one, **through** being as one we reveal God’s love for all creation.

How might we understand this calling to “be one as we are one”?

Last Sunday was Trinity Sunday, when we name this doctrine that God is at the same time One and Three. God as Trinity - as much as we’d like to capture and own it as concept – invites us to encounter mystery, not certainty. God as Trinity suggests relationship, community, something ever fluid in movement between and amongst. It alludes to distinct identity, known more fully through unity, a unity that strengthens and renews and outpours in abundance for life.

When we name there are distinct tikanga, we will identify with one tikanga. Naming tikanga honours and respects that different cultures order their community life and the way they approach and enact ministry differently. Identifying our difference has meant we’ve separated, developed separately, maybe looked at the things that make us separate. Along the way have we come to forget that **together** because we’re different we’re more fully able to express and bring to life the body of Christ in the world?

Perhaps the struggle with how to live as a three-tikanga church mirrors our struggle with Trinity, how to be at the same time one and three. Rather than engage the struggle it’s easier to focus on the identity, the function, and the particularity of a, or our, component part. Our individual identity is known to us so it’s simpler to relate to and from there and to trust more in our separateness. Perhaps it’s easier for us to remain within the familiarity of relationship with the part we know, hoping it will provide sufficient insight of the whole.

Such preference to gather with those like us is common to all living creatures. Humans are not immune, though we say we are more aware and perhaps willing to include difference. This community of St Matthew's makes bold claim that it's a 'Place for All,' a place of active inclusion and embrace, especially of those different, of those who find themselves outsiders. As the process of Parish consultation begins after this service let's remain aware of and mindful of the ways we practice this embrace of all within our community as well as beyond it.

We're called to be one as God is one, invited into the intimacy of God who is expressing in relationship, as a community of love, where unique identity is held and revealed in unity. A unity that strengthens and compels each of us outward, desiring all receive such taonga.

Can we expect this of and as we are a community of faith? Is our experience of this rare for, like faith, we need to grow in understanding, acceptance and embrace of the grace and gift we are each to the other? Community **is who** we are, where we learn to love and be loved, where we discover our uniqueness. Such faith community impels us to go strengthened, willing overflowing with grace freely given for the life of the world.