



**Rev Helen Jacobi**

**Good news**

Christmas Eve

Isaiah 52:7-10

John 1:1-14

24 December 2021

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news.” (Is 52:7)

We could do with some good news.

We want the sentinels on the walls of Jerusalem to sing out when they see the messenger coming with news of a victory won or a new king born.

We have had enough of our news headlines: daily covid counts, second, third and fourth waves; working our way through the greek alphabet as we count up the variants.

In church language we call Jesus the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end; that’s all the greek alphabet we usually need.

We have had enough haven’t we of the uncertainty; not being able to plan ahead; and missing loved ones overseas can bring us to despair.

So where is the good news this Christmas, where is the light that shines in the darkness?

On Monday morning this week we experienced good news; we saw some light in the darkness.

Cate and I were privileged to be amongst the requisite 100 people who gathered at dawn on Monday for the blessing of Homeground, the new home for the Auckland City Mission, Te Tāpui Atawhai.

The full moon was setting as we arrived and we gathered here in the church before walking next door to begin.

The karanga rang out across the city that was waking up, just like the sentinels on the walls of Jerusalem, the karanga announced that good news was breaking through the dawn.

Kaumatua of Ngati Whatua o Orakei prayed at the entrance to Homeground and then we moved in touching the mauri stone that had been laid, capturing the spirit of the place.

We were divided into groups and my group moved through the rooms of the Calder Centre, the new and expanded medical centre. (Named of course for Rev Jasper Calder, founder of the City Mission and priest of this church.)

The rooms were still empty but the names were on the doors – dentist, doctor, nurse, social worker; as we wove in and out of each room with the chants of the kaumatua leading us, we all touched the walls and prayed our own prayers as we went, prayers for healing that will take place in those spaces.

Healing for those who have many and complex health needs, healing for those who need to be listened to with care and compassion.

We could feel already the hope that was present.

As we came back together with other groups who had blessed the dining rooms and kitchens and other offices, we gathered in the laneway that crosses through the building and we were struck by the light, the beautiful wood, high ceilings, space to breathe, space to be.

Then in our groups we were sent up in the lifts and my group was lucky enough to be allocated the top floors of the tower block.

In that block are 80 apartments waiting to house people currently on the streets and others on social housing wait lists.

These residents will be supported 24 hours a day by a social worker.

On the very top floor we came out of the lift into the roof top gardens – with beds all ready and waiting to be planted; and a large space which can be hired for gatherings and receptions.

By now the sun was rising over the city and we felt like shouting from the rooftops – look Auckland, look what we have done! We moved down to the eighth floor and blessed the apartments – each just one room with a bed and a couch and a little kitchenette and a bathroom.

I stood for a while in one and wondered what it would mean to someone currently sleeping rough to have this space, safe, quiet, and with an amazing view across the city.

Just the space itself can bring healing, of that I was sure.

Other groups blessed more apartments, the detox floors, and more offices and gathering spaces.

Then we gathered downstairs to hear speeches and waiata. And those who spoke talked of the dream of so many years to create a decent and beautiful space for the most needy in our society.

Not a cast off old building beyond repair that would do because, after all, “these people should be grateful for anything”.

Instead the firm conviction to build a home for rest and healing, a place of flourishing.

Helen Robinson, our City Missioner spoke of all the people who have literally built the dream: the architects, builders, the fundraisers and donors – who believed \$110 million was attainable; the courageous Board; the staff team; and all of us in support.

And then she stood there and in a voice of great authority she claimed the building as a place of hope, a place of healing for those deemed “unworthy” by most of society.

And she spoke of the power of acting and standing together.

Look what we have achieved, she said.

Afterwards at the breakfast here in the church everyone I spoke to was so proud of what they had done – the builders who have built plenty of big and beautiful buildings before were in awe of their own work.

They had built hope into the walls.

The staff were both proud and a just a little bit scared – aware of the massive task of the next 2 months as they move in and operationalise the dream.

When the first person sleeps their first night in one of the apartments and when the first person has their dentist appointment then the dream will have become real.

The work will be challenging, lives will not be magically transformed overnight, but with the tool of Homeground good things will happen.

Good news will be heard each and every day.

Despite lockdown delays and many hurdles Homeground is now a reality.

It is light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.

Auckland has done this, we have done this.

At our Christmas tables this year let's ban talk of covid, let's instead tell stories of good news.

What has been the good news of your year, where has light broken in, what news is worth shouting from the walls or the rooftops.

What news do you want to quietly tell yourself?

Small things, big things, there is plenty of good news to share.

And when we share that news give thanks to God who is in all things, amongst it all, sleeping rough or sleeping in a a new bed.

God is with us, that is the point of the Christmas story.

The messenger arrives this night and announces "salvation."