



What Ends, What Begins

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Year A, Matariki

Isaiah 55:6–11 | Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

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Whakataka te hau ki te uru
Whakataka te hau ki te tonga
Kia mākinakina ki uta
Kia mātaratara ki tai
E hī ake ana te atakura
He tio, he huka, he hau hū
Tihei mauri ora!

*Cease the winds from the west.
Cease the winds from the south.
Let the breeze blow over the
land.
Let the breeze blow over the
ocean.
Let the red-tipped dawn come
with a sharpened air.
A touch of frost, a promise of a
glorious day.
Behold the breath of life.*

A sower goes out to sow.

It's one of Jesus' most simple parables. A farmer scatters seed, and it lands in all sorts of places. Some of it never really has a chance. Some springs up quickly but doesn't last. Some gets crowded out. And some lands in good soil, grows, and bears fruit beyond anyone's expectations.

Alongside that, Isaiah gives us another image from the natural world. Rain and snow fall from heaven, soaking into the earth. They don't return without accomplishing something. They nourish the ground. They bring life. They produce bread for the hungry and seed for the next season. God says, "My word is like that." Even when we can't yet see what God is doing, God is already at work.

But Isaiah begins somewhere else. Before the promise comes an invitation: "Seek the Lord while he may be found... let the wicked forsake their way." Before new life begins, something has to be left behind.

I don't think it's any accident that these are the readings appointed for us during Matariki.

Before we go any further, though, I want to acknowledge something important. Matariki isn't ours. It isn't a Christian festival with a Māori name attached to it. It is a taonga of Te Ao Māori: older than this church, older than our diocese, older than the lectionary that usually shapes our worship.

This year, the national Matariki celebrations are being hosted here in Tāmaki Makaurau under the theme Tāmaki Herenga Waka: Tāmaki, the gathering place of many canoes. So rather than trying to make Matariki fit neatly into our Christian story, perhaps our task is simply to listen well. To notice where these biblical texts and the wisdom of Matariki illuminate one another, while honouring each for what it is.

One of the people who has helped many New Zealanders understand Matariki more deeply is Māori astronomer and scholar Professor Rangi Mātāmua. He describes the nine stars of Matariki as carrying different aspects of life: remembering those who have died, caring for the natural world, celebrating the harvest, and looking with hope towards the future.

One of the things I find most moving about the story of Matariki is that it begins with grief.

In one telling, when Ranginui and Papatūānuku were torn apart, Tāwhirimātea was so overwhelmed by grief that he tore out his own eyes and flung them into the sky rather than watch what had been done. Those eyes became Matariki. Whether we hear this story as history, theology, sacred story, or a combination of each, it tells us something deeply human: hope and grief are never far apart, and hope doesn't get to skip past grief to get to the good part.

The stars that rise each winter remind us that remembering those we've lost isn't separate from looking towards the future. Somehow, the two belong together, in the same sky, in the same week.

Two of those stars especially speak into today's readings.

Pōhutukawa is the star connected with those who have died. During Matariki, names are spoken aloud. Lives are remembered. Grief isn't hidden away or rushed through, or managed quietly so no one else has to feel it. It's shared, out loud, in company.

I wonder how often we try to skip that part. We want resurrection without Holy Saturday. We want the harvest without the waiting, or the rot, or the seed that never came up at all. We want new beginnings without admitting what actually died to make room for them.

But both Matariki and Isaiah refuse to let us skip it. Sometimes God asks us to lay something down before we can receive something new. Sometimes that's grief. Sometimes it's resentment, or fear, or the illusion that we can make life flourish entirely on our own, without any help and without any cost.

And then there is Hiwa-i-te-rangi, the star associated with hopes and aspirations for the coming year.

Traditionally, people speak their hopes under Hiwa-i-te-rangi before they have any evidence those hopes will come to anything at all.

I rather like that. Because isn't that what faith often looks like?

Not certainty. Not having all the answers. But entrusting ourselves to God before we know how the story ends.

That is exactly where Isaiah leaves us. God's word is already at work, like rain soaking into dry ground. We may not see the harvest yet, but that doesn't mean nothing is happening.

And I think that brings us back to Jesus.

Because the remarkable thing about the parable isn't really the different kinds of soil. It's the generosity of the sower.

The sower keeps scattering seed everywhere. Even onto the hard path. Even among the rocks. Even into the thorns.

God doesn't wait until the ground is perfect before offering grace.

Which is good news, because if we're honest, most of us are probably a mixture of all four soils. There are parts of our lives that are open and receptive, and other parts that have become hard through disappointment, shallow through exhaustion, or crowded by worry.

Yet God keeps sowing. God hasn't given up on us. God's word continues to fall, patiently and persistently, trusting that even ground that looks barren today may become fertile tomorrow.

As we mark Matariki this year, I wonder what each of us brings into this place today.

Perhaps there is someone you are remembering.

Perhaps there is something you know you need to let go of.

Perhaps there is a hope you hardly dare speak aloud.

Whatever it is, God is big enough to hold it. The God who sends rain upon the earth. The God who keeps sowing seed with extraordinary generosity. The God whose word never returns empty.

Tihei mauri ora.