



Rev Dr David Williams

Matariki

Isaiah 25:6-9

John 11:21-17

26 June 2022

- On Friday 24th June there was a new legal public holiday for the peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand: Matariki.
- Legal public holidays are a mixed bag. Few people have any idea why the provincial district of Auckland, comprising about half of the North Island north of Mokau in the west and Wairoa in the east, needs to be celebrated in the last weekend of January. The Queen's Birthday holiday in June is not celebrated on the Queen's birthday. Labour Day is observed in October to mark the struggle of trade unionists for an eight-hour working day. In 2020 only 16% of employees in the labour force were members of a trade union. Members of this congregation are aware of the meaning of Christmas and Easter though in the 2018 census almost half (48.6%) of New Zealanders stated they had no religion signifying the first time that the number of 'religiously unaffiliated' people has exceeded those who identified as Christians.
- What then are we to make of Matariki and why might it be important to have a sermon on the topic this Sunday closest to the new public holiday? Part of the answer must be that stories and symbols that connect people to their origins and to their sense of identity are important.
- In this church we have a piece of the foundation stone from the Abbey of St Augustine in Canterbury, England. The history of Christianity in Wales, Ireland and Scotland is a bit different, but for the Church of England Canterbury is of huge symbolic importance and the Archbishop of Canterbury is an office of significance for the whole Anglican Communion – though the archbishop's official residence is Lambeth Palace in south London, rather than in Canterbury.
- Origin stories are of immense importance for tangata whenua of this land. There are many stories of the voyages of discovery – navigating by ocean currents, the winds, the bird migration tracks, and the stars from various islands

within Polynesia. Especially the stars were important. There are several scores of waka narratives, not just the ahistorical notion of seven canoes in a 'Great Fleet' in 1350, about arriving in Aotearoa, Te Waipounamu and Rēkohu over a couple of hundred years – before weather pattern changes made return voyaging no longer possible. Those star navigators and their ancestors had discovered every island – spread far apart from each other – in an ocean we call the Pacific that covers half the planet. At a time when Europeans were in fear of falling off the edge of the world if they ventured too far out to sea. A great book to read is Andrew Crowe, *Pathway of the Birds: The Voyaging Achievements of Māori and Their Polynesian Ancestors* (2018).

- When the forebears of those who came to be known as Māori arrived here, they brought reminders of the homeland they had left behind. The Tainui canoe brought sacred soil from Rangiātea. It was brought ashore by Hoturoa and used to construct an altar at Kāwhia. When Ngāti Raukawa and Ngāti Toa migrated from Kawhia to Ōtaki they buried soil as a mauri under the altar of their new Hāhi Mihinare church, which was also called Rangiātea. The mauri was found and protected after Rangiātea was destroyed by fire in 1995 and then rebuilt. The idea of a mauri of sacred soil resonates with the story of the Abbey of St Augustine stone here in this church.

- Mātauranga Maori is at the heart of the Matariki public holiday, and official documents state that it will be a time for:

Remembrance – Honouring those we have lost since the last rising of Matariki

Celebrating the present – Gathering together to give thanks for what we have

Looking to the future – Looking forward to the promise of a new year

- Matariki is the Māori name for the Pleiades, and refers to a cluster of stars that in this part of the world rises in mid-winter, marking the start of the Māori New Year. Some iwi name this time of year Puanga, after a bright star that is above and to the right of the Matariki constellation. Te Pahi o Matariki is a central symbol for the Kīngitanga Movement – as per this Koroneihana [Coronation] scarf.

- It is also an important time in the Pacific, which has significant associations with Matariki.

- In this church it has been the custom for a number of years to do a reading of the list of the departed around All Saints Day in November. That seems an important custom to maintain. Perhaps though in our three Tikanga church – celebrated on Te Pouhere Sunday last week with a thoughtful sermon from Wilf Holt – in future years maybe the Sunday closest to Matariki would be another

appropriate choice for continuing the custom. A mid-winter feast like the Christmas/New Year season is for northern hemisphere folk.

- Indeed, our neighbours in the City Mission, on Thursday this week came here to hold a gathering naming and remembering a considerable number of people known to the City Mission who had died in the recent past, and who for various reasons (most obviously COVID restrictions) had not been farewelled in a funeral or memorial service.

- So I invite all of you in the congregation today (including those on our dear friend St Zoom) to call to mind those who have died over the last while, to celebrate the mid-winter present, and to look forward to the promises you hope for in the coming year. I have been to five tangihanga, funerals and memorial services in the last few months. I offer some reflections on the people farewelled on those occasions.

- Te Moananui-ā-Kiwa [Moana] Jackson was farewelled in an amazing tangihanga in Heretaunga/Hawkes Bay. His ōhaki was that kaikōrero wāhine should farewell him by speaking to him, not inside the whare, not under the mahau porch, but on the marae atea outside. A number of women from most oncoming ope groups took the opportunity, whilst Moana's close ally over many years of struggle – Annette Sykes – sat on the host hapū paepae. This was a celebration of a life dedicated to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, mātauranga Māori, te reo Māori, and tikanga Māori. His work on decolonisation is being taken seriously in this church. I see that on Saturday 23 July there will be a workshop on 'Addressing problems within the environment: A post-colonial view.' That is the looking forward part, and some of you are on that important journey.

- Bruce Davidson, long time Chancellor of the Diocese of Auckland, was farewelled in a full requiem mass at the Cathedral's St Mary's. Five bishops and many clergy and laity were there. I worked a lot with Bruce in the 1990s at General Synod and in this Diocese as we designed and put in place the structures of the three Tikanga church that Wilf spoke about last Sunday. That structure, like all structures, is necessarily a work in progress as Wilf noted. So we can celebrate the present, but also look to what the future may be for those structures.

- Nadja Tollemache was the first woman to be appointed to be a Lecturer in the Faculty of Law at the University of Auckland in 1966. Later she became the first woman to be appointed Ombudsman and later Banking Ombudsman. A devout Catholic, she bore eight children almost all of whom were born between November and February and she missed no teaching terms during her tenure at the Law Faculty. In remembering Nadja, I reflected on the changes within professional faculties of universities, and within the church too, where women

now undertake roles and responsibilities previously denied to them. There was not a single women in my LLB graduation class in 1969; now 65% of Auckland law students are women. That is a reason for celebration, but looking to the future, is there more work to be done on gender equity issues in all aspects of our society – Heck yes.

- Mary-Rose Wilson died during a COVID lockdown period. I knew her at St Peter's Willis Street in Wellington and in more recent years as friend of Gavin Rennie. Gavin spoke eloquently in the memorial service in All Saint's, Ponsonby, recently. Gavin spoke of Mary-Rose in her important roles at Friendship House in Manukau city, as it then was. The work of social service providers and chaplains is work that thoroughly deserves to be celebrated. In looking to the future, have the political, social and economic inequalities – so evident to those working at Friendship House in South Auckland in the past – been solved. No, not solved, not even ameliorated. Much more work to be done in the future.

- Joseph Parata Hawke of Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei was my friend for 47 years. We worked together on many issues as he and his iwi struggled their way from the abject depths of depression when they were evicted from Ōkahu Bay in 1951, through the occupation of Bastion Point/Takaparawhau in 1977-78, through the years of being shunned in the aftermath of that struggle, to finally being accorded a farewell at Ōrākei marae where hundreds of people from throughout the land paid their respects to him and saluted him, his wife Rene and their whānau for what they had done for our nation. Ngāti Whātua certainly celebrate what they have achieved since the Treaty Settlements of 1991 and 2012. Looking to the future, there is certainly more to be done. Just this year a High Court judge refused to grant a declaration that Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei hold mana whenua over central Auckland.

- No reira, haere ra nga mate, haere ki te moengaroa, haere ki te rangimarie o Te Atua, moe mai ra, moe mai ra, moe mai ra koutou.

- In the reading from the prophet Isaiah this morning it was proclaimed that the Lord God will swallow up death forever and will wipe away the tears from all faces. The text calls for banquets and celebrations and emphasises the end of mourning. That is not to deny the reality of death but to put an emphasis upon life and the living after we have farewelled our loved ones. The same, I think, is true for Matariki. We remember the dead, but through and in our acts of memorial, we also come to see and value life anew.

- Remembrance – Honouring those we have lost since the last rising of Matariki Celebrating the present – Gathering together to give thanks for what we have Looking to the future – Looking forward to the promise of a new year

- HAPPY NEW YEAR