



Rev Diana Rattray
Lenten Hope

Gen 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Matthew 4:1-11

Year A Lent 1

26 February 2023

We continue to live with the impact of the extreme weather events, the terrible impact of floods and cyclones, and I acknowledge those here today and watching on line whose lives have changed forever. The impact is huge - and what we can do to support people now - and how we can avoid it happening again is so complex.

This week I read a well written, yet challenging article, reflecting on the floods and cyclone in Aotearoa. It was written by Tim Martin an Environmental Scientist in Whangarei. His call, echoed by many, is that we need to shift land use over vast areas of steep hill country, returning it to permanent forests as well as restricting where and how we build and rebuild. He attributes much of the destruction to poor land management and human greed. His encouragement is not to forget about these last few weeks when planning for the future. It will require some really hard choices to be made. There will be a financial cost and a physical cost as we move forward.

What might this have to do with the first Sunday in Lent? Well in our readings we hear of Paradise and plenty in one and desert and scarcity in the other. Lent is all about choices – hard choices. And no I don't mean giving up chocolate or coffee – although that is fine if you have decided to do that. As a world, as a nation, as individuals we are going to have to make some hard choices if we are serious about the survival of many species and the planet.

The forty day journey of Lent is about deciding over and over about what we do and how we choose to live. It is about our relationship with the sacred and the divine and our relationship with each other and the land.

The reading from Genesis is often referred to as “The Fall”. Episcopal Bishop and Philosopher Jake Owensby uses the term “thrownness” when thinking about human choice. He talks about each of us being thrown into a world not of our own making. We didn’t choose our parents, or DNA, nation of birth, economic class, or political system we were born into. We are thrown into injustices, absurdities and ongoing catastrophes not of our own making. He suggests the idea of ‘thrownness’ as a helpful way to talk about the story of Adam and Eve. It is not about parents who made lousy choices, it is not the Augustinian notion of sin passing from parents to children because of sex. Rather and I quote Bishop Jake “ the fall is the idea we are free to make choices in a world shattered in ways not of our own making, a world that is at once breathtakingly beautiful and hideously scarred. Our spiritual challenge is to walk in love in a way that might heal, mend, and even transform our circumstances.”^[1]

Rev Canon Christopher Douglas-Huriwai, preached powerful words on Ash Wednesday.^[2] Addressing the flood stricken people of Te Taitokerau, Te Tairāwhiti and Te Matau a Maui, he reminded them and us all of the three pillars of Lent:

Whakawhirinaki – love towards God expressed in prayer

Whakamārie love towards others expressed through charity

Whakapūmau – love towards self - expressed in fasting

We seek to be closer to God, closer to our neighbour and closer to ourselves. The three traditional pillars of Lent, Prayer, Almsgiving and Fasting are three actions deeply rooted in the idea of love.

Love towards God – can be seen as a prayer opportunity to sit with the reality we are facing. We can be open about all the difficult things that we are facing in our lives and our need for the divine. An action to lead us away from distractions of the world into an awareness of the One who is love

Love towards other – charity – an opportunity when we can and where we can, to manaaki one another.

Almsgiving allows us to see others, to love others and to listen to others as well as the giving of time and possessions to help in times of need or distress. The true meaning of charity is to love God and others.

Love to ourselves – fasting – feel the deep grief and emotion of the time, the loss of property, livelihood and tragically some lives. Permission to be gentle and gracious with ourselves- Fasting may be taking a rest from things that prevent us from keeping in right relationship with each other. To help us increase our spiritual awareness. A tall order. We don't always get it right.

We continue to fall short of the ideal, to mess up, in our own lives as individuals and also collectively when it comes to economic inequality, impact on the environment and human rights for all regardless of gender sexuality or any other point of difference.

Yet even the One who came in response to humanity's mess was tempted. Not tempted in the sense that we might say we are tempted to have just one more potato chip and then scoff the whole bag. Rather temptation here is the testing of integrity and purpose. An examination of the soul.

Franciscan theologian John Duns Scotus teaches that Jesus was not God's reaction to sin but God's first thought in creating all things, because God's motive for creation is love. When we in turn love, we make ourselves open and vulnerable to God's love. When we drop our pretences, when we make space for grief, our own interior

dissonance we become more open to love. The time in the wilderness gave Jesus the insight and the courage to surrender, and so to depend, not on his own best efforts, but on an emptiness that can only be filled by a gift of grace.

At the end of the day, the spiritual life is never about us, about what we can and cannot do. At the end of the day, it is always about the divine, and about God's gifts—grace and love will not fail. That is the hope we hold onto as we journey through Lent, through tough times, through Holy Week, Good Friday and as we look towards Easter.

I finish with another story of hope and for me one of the most poignant images this week. The Wairoa Kapa Haka group Mātangirau performed at Te Matatini wearing Cyclone Gabrielle mud smeared on their legs. They didn't know whether they would make it, or whether they should make the journey. They were encouraged to continue and travel to Tāmaki Makaurau and perform at the festival. It wasn't easy, the group travelled over damaged roads in a school bus, and then vans lent to them. Back in Wairoa whānau who would normally have travelled to support them packed into a local theatre to watch the television coverage. One local said “ So the nannies that did come, tears, cried right through the whole thing. The whole crowd was blown away – It's something good for our town as well something positive for our town.”^[3] May we all find those things that give us hope during our journey this Lent. Amen.

[1] Jake Owensby – “Looking for God in Messy Places” (2021) p 21

[2] Rev Canon Christopher Douglas-Huriwai, Te Pihopatanga o Aotearoa Facebook page <https://fb.watch/iUYMv7OHWy/>

[3] <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/484765/wairoa-s-matangirau-sings-loudly-for-day-two-of-te-matatini>