



ORDINATION SERVICE ADDRESS

Methodist Conference 2014

Hamilton

Te Hāhi Weteriana O Aotearoa

Ordination Service Address

Sunday 16 November 2014

Claudlands Stadium Hamilton

Rev Rex Nathan

“Ordination in a Changing World”

1 Timothy 5:17 - 20

2 Timothy 4:1 - 5

The Changing Nature of Aotearoa New Zealand

Kororia ki te Atua
He Maungarongo Ki te Whenua
Me te whakaaro pai ki nga tangata katoa

Glory be to God
Peace on Earth
And goodwill to all mankind

God of the Past

Christianity in Aotearoa New Zealand is nearing its 200th anniversary this year.

History records that on the 25th December 1814, Rev Samuel Marsden, from the Anglican Church Missionary Society, at the invitation of Ngapuhi Chief Ruatara, conducted the first recorded formal Christian service in Aotearoa New Zealand and read from the Gospel of Luke Chapter 2 verse 10, “Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy”.

This historical occasion took place near Rangihoua Pa at Oihi, known also as Hohi, in the Bay of Islands.

Chief Ruatara had spent some time in Sydney Australia with Rev Samuel Marsden learning to speak and understand the English language and was very impressed by what he had heard Rev Samuel Marsden preaching about.

He was so impressed that he invited Rev Samuel Marsden to come to New Zealand to preach to his Maori whanaunga in the Bay of Islands.

And so it was on Christmas Day in 1814 that Samuel Marsden read the text from Luke Chapter 2. There was no record of what he preached about but it was assumed that he spoke about the birth of Jesus Christ as is contained in the text.

The majority of 400 Maori gathered at the time had no understanding of the English language which meant that Chief Ruatara acted as interpreter and what was said obviously had a profound effect on the establishing of the beginnings of Christianity in Aotearoa New Zealand.

What followed soon after was the arrival of other Christian mission leaders including CMS Anglican Rev Henry Williams (1823), Wesleyan Rev Samuel Leigh (1822) and Roman Catholic Bishop Jean Baptiste Francois Pompallier (1838).

Following their arrival, mission stations were established around various parts of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The first Pakeha child born in New Zealand on the 21st February 1815, was Thomas Henry King, the son of Missionary John King and his wife Hannah (maiden name Hansen)

The events that took place 200 years ago between Chief Ruatara and Rev Samuel Marsden enabled the establishment of Christianity in Aotearoa New Zealand and led not only to the development of Church life in our nation but also the foundation for a bicultural life in Aotearoa New Zealand between Maori and Pakeha.

At the time of establishment, there seemed to be general support amongst most Maori accepting Christianity and the teachings of the Missionaries.

The Missionaries were also prominent and influential in encouraging Maori to accept and sign Te Tiriti O Waitangi.

However, not everything was simple and plain sailing. There were some Maori who rejected Christianity and others objected to accepting Te Tiriti O Waitangi and refused to sign the document.

Aotearoa New Zealand today is very different to what it was like in 1814.

We are a hugely multi-cultural society with a large number of immigrants from several countries worldwide who have brought their cultural practices to this country.

There are approximately 35 different religions worshipping in New Zealand. However, statistics recently produced has the number of people belonging, identifying themselves with a particular religion or are regularly attending Church has significantly reduced over recent years. These statistics compare closely with the recent census figures collected earlier in the year.

Automation is an industry that has enabled this country to keep abreast of modern technology.

During my growing up as a child, attending Sunday school and Church every Sunday was normal practice for everyone. Today, normal Sunday practice seems to be shopping, playing and watching sports, going to the beach or just lazing around waiting for Monday to commence a new week of school or work.

What then is in store for the future?

It is relatively easy to see God at work when we look backwards. Some of that has to do with the fact that we most often learn of God from Christ in Scripture, through stories and lessons that took place in the past. And these events were put into written form with the benefit of hindsight, when the authors' ability to see God's presence became clearer. I think most of us are much better at looking back than looking around or forwards.

God of the present

We can look back and see how God has used each and every one of us to do amazing things. But can we look around and see God at work in the here and now?

It is obvious that the world is a very different place now than it was during our early historical beginnings. And the role of the church is very different as well. If we can be honest with each other, we face incredible challenges. Our numbers are far fewer than they were. The Church is no longer the people's first choice of where they choose to get married. And we are not unique in these challenges, not by any stretch. Churches have always faced challenges; and these challenges are ours in the present.

And yet, there is something vitally important about what our Church community means *now*, what it represents to those of us who have *chosen* to make these places our home for worship and service.

During our visits to different places, we have heard our people talk about their church, their community, and what it means to them. They are comforted and loved by the people that surround them, but they are also grateful to be stretched and challenged about the things of faith.

We have learned to put it this way: We are here, and we are committed to serving and ministering to our community; and yet, we also know that our society's priorities of "bigger, better, faster, and stronger" are misplaced and misguided. We know that there is more to life; and we are eager to learn together what that really is.

God of the future

What then do we know about what is coming? Perhaps, nothing; except that it will be unlike anything we might imagine. The pace of change is breathtaking; it can be overwhelming at times. I am old enough to remember when the purpose of a telephone was to call people or for people to call you. Nowadays, telephones with thousands of Apps attached are capable of processing more information than anyone can imagine. Who knows what lies ahead?

The introduction of Face book, Twitter, Snapchat, Skype, YouTube, Instagram and GPS has enabled us to keep in touch with our friends and to know what is happening live at this very moment.

But that's not the point; the lessons of Scripture are drawn from the past, but more than anything else, they suggest the way forward.

Paul's letters to Timothy is aimed at your role as newly ordained Presbyters.

The Church says you have all been called to Ministry by God.

Today, you will affirm your calling to mission and ministry in Aotearoa New Zealand and the world beyond.

You will seek to nourish your ministry by prayer, study and worship within the community of faith.

You will lead a life of integrity and express God's goodness and love through the gifts God has given you.

Church members may have a different view of what is expected of you.

These are just some expressions overheard albeit somewhat humorous:

You must be available 24 hours a day 7 days a week
You must only preach a maximum of 10 minutes each sermon
You must make a minimum of 20 home visits a day
You must never miss a Church meeting, ever

However humorous these might be, we are convinced that what lies ahead is a future filled with hope.

The Church requires you to observe the three "P's"

- Remember the "R's" of education – **R**eading **wR**iting and **aR**ithmetic
- Or the three "P's" of rugby – **P**ossession, **P**osition and **P**ace

There are three “P’s” required of you as a Presbyter – **P**repare, **P**ray and **P**reach, is it as simple as that?

Paul had been a part of ordaining Timothy into the Gospel ministry. Paul realises that soon he will die, but before he goes he wants to ensure that Timothy has a fine grasp on the responsibilities of ministry. Paul says I therefore charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ that “You must preach the Word of God”

Be a life-long learner, empower your laity, preach well, invest in persons (especially your family), always have a mentor, make ministry to children and youth a high priority and pursue God with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength.

In the midst of new dimensions, in the face of changing ways, who will lead the pilgrim peoples wandering in their separate ways “Through the flood of starving people, warring factions and despair, who will lift the olive branches? Who will light the flame of care?”

We are in the midst of a new and not-yet understood time. We are face to face with breath-taking changes in every niche of our world. Literally and figuratively, people near and far are wandering, starving, warring, and despairing. And, what I want to say to you today Ordinands – you are the one God has called into the midst of these uncertain times! God is certainly not looking to you to have all the answers to solving the problems, but is looking to you to maintain your faith in God.

As much as God was with us during our beginnings in Aotearoa, and as much as God is with us in 2014, God will be with us in the years to come! There will *a/ways* be a place for a church that knows that there is more to life than meets the eye.

God has been here; is here now; and will always be here. Our role remains to trust in that truth, to act in the confidence and hope that it brings. Thanks be to God!

Matters for personal reflection

- In view of the many challenges our Church faces, ask yourself this question: **“What is God saying to me about the future of our Church?”**

To the Ordinands, May God bless you, your families and all those involved in your future as you embark on this very important part of your Ministry.

Ma Te Atua koutou manaaki, tiaki i nga waa katoa

Acknowledgements:

In the Midst of New Dimensions – Al Gwinn

Ordination Charge to the Church – Christopher Hill

What the Word of God says about the Man of God – Kevin L Jones

Adapted from Marthane’s musings, <http://www.opcbrookhaven.org>