

Sermon: Our Bicultural Heritage

by Silvia Purdie

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Bible Readings

Amos 9:11-15

Colossians 4:2-6, 12-18

I want to conclude our series on 'Being Kiwi' here at Cashmere Presbyterian with a focus on the significance of Maori culture in our nation. We are also concluding our series reading through the books of Amos and Colossians, though we have only delved just a little into the depths of these works and there is far more that could be explored. For my sermon today I have some of my own story, to go alongside these two Biblical texts, key moments in my own exploration of what it means to be a Pakeha Kiwi, in relationship with Maori.

First can I ask you to reflect for yourself for a moment on your experience of things Maori. If you have grown up in Aotearoa New Zealand then some awareness of Maori people and culture will be threaded through your life. If you have come more recently to this land, what images did you have from overseas of Maori culture, and how have you encountered it here? Can I ask, does anyone here have any Maori ancestry? Please talk to your neighbour for a minute: What has been your experience of Maori people and culture?

I grew up as a white girl in Polynesian contexts. When we lived in Tonga I was almost the only 'Palangi' at my school, Queen Salote College for girls. Before that we had lived in the predominantly Maori community of Ruatoria north of Gisborne. When we moved to Lower Hutt I studied Maori at school, and got to stay on marae & enter speech contests.

But what had seemed quite natural as a girl became increasingly fraught as a young adult. The 1980s were dramatic years for Maori culture, as the quiet respectful ways of older generations were challenged by young radical Maori, who believed that the only way to save their culture and language from decline and death was to stridently fight - for land, for rights, for recognition. And there was a deep ambivalence as to the place of Pakeha in this movement. Many Maori valued friendships and support of pakeha, but there were also voices calling for 'Mana Motuhake', space for Maori separate from Pakeha. With scarce resources why put energy and effort into teaching Pakeha the Maori language or sharing Maori culture with Pakeha people.

In 1989 I was a lay Chaplain at Victoria University after finishing my degree there. I decided to pick up my Maori language study again, which brought me into the varsity Marae. I was invited to join the Kapa Haka group, and I was the only non-Maori in it at the time. I felt honoured to be welcome there, and I went with them on a wonderful and highly memorable trip up into the heartland of the Taranaki, including to Parihaka. But on the university marae I would often be asked if I had any Maori blood, and the sense in me grew and grew that I was an imposter there, that as a Pakeha I had no right to 'pretend to be Maori'. This came to head one afternoon when the Kapa Haka was hosting a powhiri for a visiting group, and I struggled with whether or not I could wear the Kapa Haka costume. I put it on and took it off again. Some people said they wanted me there but I knew that others did not, and so I watched from the back of the room for a while and then I left, too internally conflicted to be able to be there. I never performed with them again.

As Methodist Youth Co-ordinator I had a little to do with the Maori Methodist leadership and I had a lot of respect for them, but those were the days when 'PC' reigned, when The Bicultural Journey left most of the church feeling alienated, tripping ourselves up in white guilt and confusion. The lines were tightly drawn.

The Playcentre movement handled the Bicultural journey better, I feel. I began as a Playcentre mum in Wainuiomata, a suburb with a large Maori population, and I became the Bicultural Officer for the regional Playcentre Association. I helped organise two very successful marae weekends, where heaps of families, white, P and Maori, were able to experience in a relaxed non-threatening way the joys of Maori culture, music, fellowship, crafts and food.

But the most important moment of all in my personal Bicultural Journey happened one night in Foxton, my first parish as a Presbyterian Minister. Few people know this, but the very first Church of Scotland missionary to work among Maori came to Foxton, so it has a special place in our church history. I arranged for the leadership of Te Aka Puaho, our Presbyterian Maori Synod, to stay a night in a local marae, and several folks from the Foxton parish came for the evening to share kai and korero. That was one of the most magical nights of my life. It was a beautiful small traditional carved whare. After dinner we sat around on mattresses, leaning against the tukutuku panels, the light dim and warm. We said prayers, sang a couple of songs, then each person around the room was invited to share whatever they wanted to share. Stories were told about mission history, stories were told about personal history. About half way around the room one Maori woman began to talk when it was her turn and one of my parishioners cried out, leapt up off the floor and rushed across and embraced her. They hadn't recognised each other until that moment, but they realised that they had trained together

as teachers many decades earlier. They had lost touch, but never forgotten each other. The tears flowed and they sat with arms around each other for the rest of the evening.

For me the experience of acceptance and aroha was so strong and so powerful that it healed the hurt in my soul from the ambivalence of rejection as a Pakeha from Maori culture. The Holy Spirit was tangibly present with us that night.

The theme of the Te Aka Puaho leadership at that time was 'Oho mai' - wake up! I wrote this soon after as a tribute to them and my response.

SONG: Oho mai

Well, where to with this sermon? Time perhaps for the scriptures.

Amos. Much of Amos has been visions of destruction, written in its own time as an urgent call 'Oho mai!' Wake up! Amos is shaking up his people, trying with all his might to shake them out of their complacency. Amos is written for a 'She'll be right' culture, people who say "We're sweet, we're fine and dandy, no harm can befall us" ... but they were wrong, and devastation was indeed coming their way.

It is fascinating then that in the final verses Amos hears God almost changing his mind. These are words of restoration, not denying the pain but looking beyond it ... "I will repair the broken places and restore the ruins" says God. And the final two verses are about home. Land. Belonging. Rootedness in place. After the uprooting comes the promise of planting again.

This is the first thing I want to say about the significance of Maori culture in our nation. I honour the Maori people as Tangata Whenua, people of the land. The rest of us who own or lease or love the land of New Zealand have a different relationship to the land than Maori people do. Maori have blood ties to the land, forged over many centuries. The Maori word for Land is the same word as that of Placenta, after-birth. Whenua. So Maori have a vital role to play in this nation, for their very blood-line, their core identity, is connected, physically and spiritually, to the land of their ancestors.

We Pakeha are also planted here, as Amos promised, in this land which is also given to us, but I believe we must never take for granted our right to be here. We were welcomed here by Maori and I will always be grateful for that.

Amos was a man of the land, a shepherd and a keeper of fig trees, as he describes it. Through him God condemns the people for their trampling of the poor, their injustice and fancy religion, and this judgement is prophesied against the land itself as well as on the people, not just the land but the sun, the rain

8:8 Will not the land tremble for this - your oppression of the poor - the whole land will rise up like the Nile, it will be stirred up and then sink like the river. I will make the sun set at noon and bring darkness.

Earlier Amos predicts plagues and drought.

My second point from Amos is the interconnectedness of the human and the natural worlds. And this rings so true for us. As we face the effects of human technologies and lifestyles on the environment we are confronted all too clearly with our own greed and sin impacting outwards into the atmosphere itself. Amos' prophecies about the consequences of injustice on both created and human worlds have never been more relevant.

We need to learn from Maori about Tiakitanga, we need, now as never before, to see ourselves as Guardians of the land, and the seas and the skies. Caretakers. Only this can bring to fruition Amos' promise that the exiled people will be replanted in their land, planting vineyards and drinking the wine, making gardens and eating the fruit. Those of us who love this land must have a long-term vision and long-term commitment to the wellbeing of this land. This is the mahi of God, the work of God. Kaitiaki.

I would like to turn to Colossians before I finish this morning.

Paul concludes his letter to the church in Colossae with a bunch of greetings to people. I love the affection that drips from his words - "Our dear friend Luke". This person and that sends greetings. Paul is a real 'networker' isn't he, pointing out that so-and-so is "one of you", and that Mark is Barnabas' cousin. What I hear when I read that is Paul drawing together all the disparate little house churches here and there, and all these various people, both men and women, pulling them all together into one weaving. Paul forges a sense of belonging, a sense of whanau, between people who might otherwise be isolated and combative. So this is the 3rd thing I want to say about Maori culture; Whanaungatanga.

You know, don't you, that before the gospel came to Aotearoa Maori tribes were constantly at war with one another, locked into the 'eye for an eye' system of justice that was 'utu'. The coming of the Christian faith brought restoration to tribes who had sworn to fight and kill, as they experienced the power of Jesus Christ to forgive. Intertribal movements such as my marae at Victoria University - Nga hau e wha', for people from the four winds, was only possibly through the gospel. Whether or not we share lines of ancestry, through Christ we share whanaungatanga, we belong in family together. If you can ever go to our Presbyterian marae in Ohope you will find a place there, as one of the two central 'pou' posts is carved with a Pakeha missionary, so Maori and Pakeha, and all others who come, share and belong.

Whenua Tiaki Whanau

These are my three words for you today, ways in which I have experienced the power of the gospel of Jesus in and through Maori culture, ways in which

I believe we need to stand together as Maori and Pakeha, as brother and sisters in Christ, at home in this land, caring for our earth, caring for the poor, caring for each other.

Psalm 104: A Psalm for Aotearoa

(by Silvia Purdie)

Bless the Lord, my soul.

Kororia ki te Atua!

*You are wrapped in light,
in a korowai of glory.*

You made Rangī, Father Sky,
infinite space stretched out above us.

*You made Papatuanuku, Mother Earth,
resting strong beneath us.*

At your command Tangaroa rose and fell;
the seas once covered the mountains of this land
*but now tides and currents swirl around us,
drawn by Marama, the moon, in her monthly dance.*

Each day the sun, Ra, walks his path through the sky.

*Rain falls, springs gush up out of the earth,
nga awa, rivers flow through our islands,
water for bush and bird and cattle.*

I nga ra o mua, before Maori and Pakeha,
great forests ruled this land, Tane Mahuta:

*totara, rimu, kahikatea,
filled with birds from the smallest fantail to the giant eagle,
from the shy kiwi to the long-legged moa.*

The sea was filled with life: mighty tohora whale, sleek kahawai.

Aotearoa, cloaked with cloud, shaped by water and wind.

Nga hau e wha, winds from four directions,

brought people to these islands
and you made them a home here,

fed them from your abundance;

though at times you hid your face and the people were dismayed.

*When you take away the breath of life your creatures die
and return to the dust. Aue, aue!*

Haere, haere, haere ...

we mourn the loss of so many creatures, so much beauty.

Send forth your Spirit again on Aotearoa,

Haere mai, Wairua Tapu, renew the face of this whenua,

re-create this land,

remake us your people who call this our home, nga iwi o te motu.

May the glory of the Lord shine forever!

Kororia ki te Atua!