

## Sermon on Tamihana Te Rauparaha

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The Judaeo-Christian story is one in which God inserts himself into human history. Creation, the life of Jesus and the coming of the paraclete are three big occasions of such interpolation.

Outside of these big events God continues to participate in our history through human agents who assent to manifesting his Grace in their actions. When such agents come along they are always interesting because they arise out of the surrounding darkness of human sin and require of the persons involved, inspired vision and courage.

Tarore, a girl of tender years and a devout Christian, is murdered. The murderer absconds with her gospel of Luke which she had tucked away under her pillow. Nobody in the killer's tribe can decipher this mysterious artefact.

Enter one Riphau, missionary trained, and he reads the gospels to the people. The murderer opens his heart to the Word and begs for and is granted forgiveness by Tarore's father whose graciousness represents the acme of godliness according to Christian belief.

This act of forgiveness so transcends ordinary human psychology I am not capable of discussing it further. I simply take it on faith that that God requires us to forgive and that apart from the grace that accrues to us from doing his will, forgiveness can be liberating and psychologically healing. So, it would seem that whatever is good in heaven is also good on earth.

A ripple of providence links the death of Tarore with the life of Tamihana Te Rauparaha for Riphau takes his mission to Otaki and with him Tarore's gospel of Luke which he reads to Tamihana Te Rauparaha and his cousin Matene te Whiwhi. These are not figures from a far distant past. Indeed, they are with us today :Tamihana represented by his descendant Te Miri Bevan and Matene by his descendant Brigitte Te Aweawe. Tēnā kōrua e nga uri a rātou mā, nga mātua tūpuna.

And they have something in common with today's congregation – they were students of St Johns College, Meadowbank and so you also join this story.

What you do not have in common with Tamihana though is that his father, the great warrior chief Te Rauparaha, was held in custody by the settler government during Tamihana's time here as a student. The charges against Te Rauparaha senior were trumped up by the New Zealand Land company. Te Rauparaha never took up arms against the Crown and was really arrested for his refusal to sell the Wairau plains.

Tamihana, as eventual leader of Ngati Toa, complied with the government's demands. He refused to go to war over the arrest of his father and he agreed to sell the Wairau plains even when members of his Tribe were against it. Maori in those times had a word for those tribes or leaders who acquiesced to unjust government policies. They were called, "kūpapa". This literally means to lie flat. In this context, it means the equivalent of the the English term "turncoat."

The political context, though, is missing in the skimpy biographies left to us. An examination of the broader contemporary scene is helpful in understanding the young chief's decisions.

Here is a small sketch of some of the events unfolding in Tamihana's context:

- a. In nearby Waikato the newly appointed General Cameron writes to Governor Grey complaining that whereas he was told his job was to defend settlers against savages he found that in reality he was required to murder prosperous and hard-working natives in the interests of land hungry settlers. He resigned and went home in disgrace to Scotland. There was no place in a colonial military for a man of high moral principle.
- b. Government troops arrest Ngati Tama men (kin to Ngati Toa) about to harvest their potato crop. They are put in chains and shipped to Tasmania, a penal colony. One of their number is executed on the spot, prior to the whole-scale deportation.
- c. Wellington settlers openly despoil Ngati Toa cultivations and break fences. These were intimidatory acts done with the backing of troops. Clarke, the Protector of Aborigenes wrote this report:.. "There are hundreds of people here who execrate the Maoris as outrageous and savage cannibals because they will not allow them to trample on their rights.

In the course of my visits to the various cultivations I found that the White settlers did just as they liked, pulled down the fences and drove the cattle on the potatoes. This is systematic robbery by which the Company's settlers deprived the natives of their plantations." And Octavius Hadfield and Anglican minister wrote concerning these tensions in the Wellington area: "I begin to think there will be bloodshed before long, that a collision will take place between the settlers and the natives...the impetuosity of some settlers will probably act as a firebrand and cause a general conflagration. I do not think there is fair play here."

- d. In response to Taranaki tribes' opposition to land sales, General Pratt with a big army, attacks and sets fire to Maori villages in Waitara. Maori rally chasing Pratt's army back to New Plymouth. Maori show restraint in not pressing home their advantage and sacking the town. They sue for peace and ask several times that matters be settled in court. In this, they are supported by chief Justice Martin.
- e. Taranaki and Wellington newspapers are inflammatory and openly racist. Here is an example of this from the Wellington Independent: "Scrape a Maori, the most civilised, and the savage shows distinctly underneath. The haka is an expose of the evil which really lies at the root of their present condition, a substratum of utter immorality, depravity and obscenity which forms the groundwork of their race."

And this from the Taranaki Herald: "The rebels have the effrontery to make some sort of overture of peace (but) there can be no peace with assassins and murderers. We are at liberty at any time or place to do our best to extirpate them as we should any other wild animals of wild and ferocious nature. Their lives and lands are forfeit and we devoutly hope that no mistaken leniency will allow these natives escaping at least the latter penalty"

Knowing they have the backing of the state as well as the might of the world's foremost power at their disposal the settlers do not want peace and their language exhibits the classical ploy of tyrants – to project their very own vices onto their victims.

It is against this background that we must view the accommodationist policies of Tamihana Te Rauparaha. He saw clearly that opposition to the government would mean the destruction of his people. What anguish he must have experienced in making these decisions with the military, parliament, the law and the psychological apparatus of propaganda deployed by the media and the education system arrayed against his people.

Tamihana's Christian convictions alone prevented the bloodshed alluded to above by Hadfield. As the son of a mighty warrior he would have felt keenly the humiliation of his position. In avoiding their massacre he knew they would become landless, poor and despised. Ngati Toa at this time were wealthy traders.

The other details of his life left to us by history are these: As a young man Tamihana and his cousin Matene Te Whiwhi sailed to the Bay of Islands to secure the services of clergy for his people. They returned with Octavius Hadfield and Henry Williams.

Again, with Matene Te Whiwhi, Tamihana walked throughout the South Island for a year amongst the Ngai Tahu, traditional enemies who had suffered at the hands of his father. As a missionary He was peerless in his courage and Christian zeal. He was truly one who assented to speak God into our world.

And what of Taranaki and New Zealand today? As General Cameron was removed for opposing colonist aggression, so too was Governor Fitzroy removed for his prevention of further Māori land loss and was thus replaced by Grey, so now, the mayor of New Plymouth, has removed himself because of the abuse he suffers for supporting Maori representation on council committees.

The plebiscite on Maori wards in New Plymouth was rejected by a majority of 83%. This negative plebiscite result is typical throughout New Zealand. In Rotorua – 85% against and yet despite this vote, Mayor, Stevie Chadwick has designed her own model of iwi representation. She also suffers abuse because of that.

The experience of these two mayors is that to oppose colonist aggression invites extreme hostility thereby suggesting that New Zealand is still the colony it was in the day of General Cameron and Governor Fitzroy.

Interestingly, 85% of protestant ministers in Nazi Germany signed an oath of allegiance to Hitler. Our much touted democracy is based on majority vote and democracy gets confused with arithmetic and arithmetic gets confused with justice. Many shameful things have been done in the name of the majority. The 15% percent, the skinny side of the equation on the other hand, has been populated by some pretty decent people: Te Whiti o Rongomai, Ghandi, Octavius Hadfield, Secretary George Clarke, Commissioner William Spain, General Cameron, Lady Martin, Bonhoffer and others - as countless as the stars - so our prayer book describes the saints.

Church could do well to set up camp with them. Katene has often told me that it is for the sake of this history that you Anglicans created the 3 tikanga church.

What was Our Lord – as God walking with us - saying through the parable of the Good Samaritan if not this: *There is something wrong with the way you are viewing this other people. Let me give you a better story, a story about respect.*

What is this but an explicit directive against the sin of racism or any other form of corporate bullying, of misshapen, politics?

Over and against the notion that religion is private and driven exclusively by concern for personal sanctity is the notion that we must also be thoughtful and show love through studying and analysing our group relations with other groups to ensure justice.

Thoughtfulness, studying, analysing: these should not be foreign notions in a theological college.

Critical engagement of the mind with local and global politics will not hinder prayerfulness in ushering in God's kingdom.