

## Hall of Fame

5 November 2023

All Saints, St Peter's

Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

Most countries have halls of fame. They are places where heroes are lined up. Sometimes they have photos. New Zealand has lots of them. We have a sports hall of fame, a music hall of fame, a racing hall of fame, even a road transport hall of fame. Even Australia has a hall of fame for all those great Australians both dead alive that have contributed so much to the betterment of us all. Unfortunately, it's currently empty!

Today is All Saints Sunday. The church's Hall-of-Fame day. All Saints began as a day to celebrate those saints who would otherwise get forgotten. It had become so complicated remembering them all that the clergy needed 25 books just to have morning prayer!

All Saints Day also acknowledges that, for the early church, 'saints' was simply a catch all phrase for the people of God, because we are all the saints with a little s.

Our Gospel is striking but not entirely new. Jesus regularly used Old Testament teaching and gave it his own angle. There's an important link in the beatitudes of today's reading to Isaiah 61. Isaiah speaks of bringing good news to the poor and broken hearted, comfort to the mourners. Isaiah speaks of a time when God will turn the people's mourning into dancing, their shame into rejoicing.

In a similar way Jesus tells us of blessing the poor, comforting the mourners, feeding the hungry, and blessing the peacemakers.

I like this modern version of the beatitudes:

- 1. Blessed are the poor in spirit = blessed are those who are lowly, beaten down and disadvantaged in this world.*
- 2. Blessed are those who mourn = blessed are those who have no hope in this world and who see the brokenness of this world.*
- 3. Blessed are the meek = blessed are those who don't push back and who don't strive, cheat and scheme to succeed in this world.*
- 4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness = blessed are those who want more for this world, who want justice and mercy and kindness and truth in this world.*
- 5. Blessed are the merciful = blessed are those who are not eager to condemn the people of this world, who assume the best, seek to understand and are quick to forgive.*
- 6. Blessed are the pure in heart = blessed are the people who have not been corrupted by this world, who can still see beauty and whose hearts incline toward that which is right, loving, and good.*
- 7. Blessed are the peacemakers = blessed are those who seek reconciliation between God and humans, and between friends and neighbours.*

*8. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake = blessed are those who will push through some suffering and bear a little shame in order to pursue the Kingdom of God on earth – for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

In time Jesus is saying God's people will have these marks of mission: encouraging the broken, enabling the mourners to grieve, caring deeply about what is right and just, and working for peace and justice in the land.

The Anglican church honors people who have lived this way.

We have in our calendar of saints those that the universal church recognizes, like Peter, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Paul, but we also have some names that are unique to this land.

One such saint is Te Whiti O Rongomai. Te Whiti was born near New Plymouth about 1817. He was educated by Christian missionaries, and he developed a great love for Jesus and for the Bible, especially the Old Testament. He could, it was said, recite large sections of it off by heart. Te Whiti was a natural leader, and he established a Christian community called Parihaka on the fertile land near the western flank of Mount Taranaki. Instead of the usual fortified village it was a model town. It had carefully laid out streets, schools, churches, a sewer system, and even electric streetlights.

With the strength of his oratory, he forged his people into a Christian community taking seriously the command of Jesus to love your enemies. Sixty years before Gandhi advocated nonviolence. He told his followers, "Go put your hands to the plough. Look not back. If any come with guns and swords, be not afraid. If they smite you, smite not in return. If they rend you, be not discouraged, another will take up the good work."

On this day at 7:15am in 1881 the troops arrived to confiscate the land. What they found shocked them. The fences had already been pulled down to allow them in. The villagers offered the troops bread, and 200 children gathered to sing songs. The Minister of Lands read the riot act and was greeted with silence. The villagers cleared the way and Te Whiti, and others were arrested and taken to prison without trial. They were held for many months including in Lyttleton.

Throughout his life Te Whiti worked for peace and understanding between the races of this land. Once he was accused of being anti pakeha, he responded by saying, "What I said and wished to convey was, that the two races should live side by side in peace... the white man to live among us - not we to be subservient to his immoderate greed."

Jesus' words 'Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God,' are embodied in the life of Te Whiti. The church honours his blessedness tomorrow and remembers Parihaka today, the 5<sup>th</sup> of November.

In our world do we need people like Te Whiti? Do we need people committed to being people of peace? Yes, now more than ever, more than ever. The people of the Holy land long for just such a one as he.

For us we may not be a great orator like Te Whiti or have his memory, but we are all called to the task of reconciliation and nonviolence in our day. Never underestimate the power of small acts of reconciliation in your own family or amongst your friends or in your neighborhood. And never give up the dream of peace, however distant it might seem.

Today we hold as sacred the memory of all the saints who have done as Jesus asked and comforted the mourning. On this Parihaka Day we give thanks especially for Te Whiti and those like him, who, as peacemakers, have become children of God.