

Now what?

For those who have seen the roster, you will realise that, besides the fact that I have preached for the past two weeks, I am also preaching for the next three- but more on that in a minute.

We have had a couple of big Sunday's, haven't we? We farewelled one space and welcomed one another back into this space. We celebrated in song, prayer, and with kai. We welcomed and we blessed all those who joined us.

The excitement that we felt, and should still feel, was shared by all those who joined us; an excitement, not just about this whare, but more (and most) importantly, what this it symbolises for Hato Paora/St Paul's: the next stage in our journey of being salt and light to our community.

A season where can bring life, song, karakia, and community into this space; a space that, while defined physically by walls and ceiling, will not hinder or limit the new season of worship that started last week and continues this week and beyond.

Yet today we are not looking forward. We will, though, in two weeks.

Now as we look around this morning, we are aware that this place is not as full as it was. In fact, you might be thinking, "oh my, look at all these empty seats!"

To that, I say "fantastic". In fact, I want that phrase, "Look at all those empty seats" to become our unofficial (or should be official?) vision for this new season that The Lord is leading us on. Where some may see an empty seat, I see a seat that is waiting. Where some may see a reminder of what has been, I see a promise of what is to come.

So, I for one, am glad to see empty seats, as it speaks to what The Lord has blessed us with.

Yet today we are not looking around us. We will, though, next week.

So, why am I preaching today and for the next two weeks?

Well, I have a question to ask.

That question is simply this, "Now what?"

Now that we are in this place, now what?

Now that we have celebrated the start of this new season, now what?

In one sense, there is a simple answer; we just keep doing what we have been doing as a church called to be salt and light in our community. We keep praying, worshipping, serving, caring...all those things that we did for the 8 years that we did not meet in this space. All those things that we kept doing while the spectre of "Earthquake Strengthening loomed over us for 14 years.

Yet now that we are here, in a dedicated worship space, now that we now speak of earthquake strengthening in the past tense, now what?

Clearly The Lord has blessed us with this space for a new season, so now what?

Well, to help us discover the answer, I want us to sit with the Gospel reading for today, and for those over the next two weeks.

Each week, we will sit with 3 Gospel readings that cover the same event; the night that Jesus broke bread and shared wine with his disciples. Communion.

Now besides being an act where we relive and retell our faith journey, Communion does three things. It gives us an opportunity to be still (in the words of the Psalmist) and know God. It speaks to our present, and it speaks to our future.

Communion is gift, invitation, and challenge.

Today, and for the next two weeks we will sit with each of those three aspects.

Now, in the new welcome brochure, that sits in our foyer, the first thing people will read the about us, as a church, is the following

- We are, first and foremost, followers of Jesus. Which explains our theology
- We love being part of the Anglican Movement in Wellington- a transformative movement of local faith communities. This explains our culture and therefore cultural and traditional practices.
- We believe communion is a gift that we have to offer our community- a practical symbol of love, grace, restoration, forgiveness, and reconciliation. This explains our mission.

As an Anglican church, our language and entire shape of our service points us towards Communion, whereas in other churches which I have been a part of, the service pointed to the sermon and time of ministry. Yet here, right from the start our time together, we always know where we will end up.

We don't take communion each because our culture demands that we do, nor do we take it each week, because we did the week before.

We take it each week, as it is the ultimate expression of the freedom, peace, grace, joy, love, hope, restoration, and invitation we see in Jesus.

In fact, if you look around, the very architecture of this where points our gaze towards the altar, doesn't it. Not to me, musicians, or lectern; but communion.

So, today now what?

Well, today we pause and take a breath.

I say this, as often in churches, we talk of moving forward, the next season, the new journey- all those phrases that I have used over the past couple of weeks. Some might think that today would be the very day that I should talk of moving forward; yet, with talk like that, churches can miss is the opportunity to pause, reflect, give thanks, and even just take a breath.

A couple of weeks ago, I used the image of loved one heading overseas as a way for us to locate ourselves.

Today, I want to use another image- one shaped around a wedding, birthday party, or any other significant event where people gather to celebrate- kind of like we did last week. You know, one of those events, where there is a lot of activity, noise, hosting and dishes to be done....

Rather I draw your attention to that time, either the same or next day, when the dishes are done, the floors vacuumed, and the house is quiet; and you find yourself sitting with someone (or reflecting by yourself) and you take a deep breath and say “ahhhhhh”.

You know that feeling?

We need to do just that today.

So, let's do that now.

We pause and take a moment to breathe in and go “ahhhhhh”.

We pause and take a moment to revel in what The Lord has done.

We pause and are thankful for the past two weeks of services- which were full of emotion, and busyness.

We pause and look around this whare and at one another; we are here and we will move forward together

We pause to remember that The Lord has led us here, and that is for a purpose.

We pause in The Lord's presence.

Communion allows us to do that, doesn't it. The very nature of the words we are led in, each week, affords us time to pause and pray.

Communion is not remembering Jesus, like we are gazing at an old photograph to get warm and fuzzy feelings, but rather an act of worship him in his presence.

Communion is counter cultural. At a time when others look to politicians, celebrities, or protestors for hope; we, in the very act of taking communion, physically turn our back on human kingdom and culture, and look to Jesus.

We acknowledge the need to not only welcome Christ's Kingdom on earth, but to live and walk as Christ did.

Lining up for communion, can be either a time of conversation, or it can be time to pause and reflect.

There are moments during communion that allow us to pause- in the receiving of the bread, wine, or juice. There is also the side chapel, where you can also take longer time to pause and pray silently, if you wish.

Because, in communion, we should pause.

In pausing, we can lift our gaze from culture to Christ.

In pausing, we get to choose Christ's Kingdom over human ones.

In pausing, we get to commit to Christ above all else.

In pausing, we know we are free.

In pausing, we are reminded of all Christ has done for us.

To aid us in pausing today, we will not have a communion song, rather we can use the silence, and this sacred space to pause, breathe, and pray.

In pausing, we also prepare to lift our gaze to what is around us and what is to come.

More on that next week.

Amen