

Today's message is entitled *While I am the one speaking this morning, I not the one preaching*.

Did you know that the ancient Hebrews were very familiar with the Pleiades clusters, that we refer to as Matariki? They also observed it as a seasonal marker and named it *Kimah* (Keemah, which means "cluster").

We see three references them in the Hebrew Scriptures,

Amos 5:8

*He who made the Pleiades and Orion,
who turns midnight into dawn
and darkens day into night,
who calls for the waters of the sea
and pours them out over the face of the land—
the Lord is his name.*

The prophet Amos calls the people to seek the Creator, who has the power to control the cosmos, including the Pleiades.

Job 9:8-9

⁸ *He alone stretches out the heavens
and treads on the waves of the sea.*
⁹ *He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the constellations of the south.*

In this passage, Job acknowledges God's sovereignty and creative power, highlighting the Pleiades as part of the celestial wonders fashioned by the Almighty.

And again, in Job 38:31

*"Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades?
Can you loosen Orion's belt?"*

Here, God challenges Job, emphasizing His unparalleled authority over the universe. The "chains of the Pleiades" metaphorically represent the gravitational bonds that hold the stars together, a feat beyond human capability.

As with anything in Scripture, the minute someone, someplace, or something is named, we know that it is of deep significance.

These mentions of Kimah in Scripture serves to underscore the vastness and complexity of God's creation. The stars are a testament to His wisdom and might, reminding believers of their place within the grand design of the universe. The Pleiades, visible to the naked eye, have been a source of wonder and inspiration throughout history, symbolizing the order and beauty inherent in God's handiwork.

In ancient Near Eastern cultures, the Pleiades were often associated with agricultural cycles and seasonal changes. Their appearance in the night sky marked important times for planting and harvesting. The biblical references to the Pleiades reflect an awareness of these celestial patterns and their significance in the natural world.

So, while some may see the celebration and acknowledgement of Matariki as merely a public holiday, we know that it is much more- not just as people who call Aotearoa home, but also people who share a spiritual whakapapa back to the Hebrew Scriptures.

Yet, let me use the koreo of someone who has not only a connection with Waiwhetū, but also with Wayne. Chief advisor Mātauranga Matariki, Professor Rangi Mātāmua, who this week, told RNZ,

"We are really focusing on making sure that people feel like they can engage with Matariki, that it's not just a Māori holiday. And in fact, the cluster of Pleiades across the world is used by so many different cultures."

"There are no Matariki police. There's no one coming around to tell you, 'this is how you do it' and 'this is how you don't do it'."

"There are three elements to Matariki; it's about remembering those who are no longer with us and we celebrate... their impact upon our lives. We celebrate who we are today with feasting and merriment and sports and entertainment. And then we look to the future."

"Anything you do that's connected to any of those things is celebrating Matariki."

So, what do we do, as a people who share Matariki and Kimah? Well, allow me to start by doing something a bit different with my message this morning, as we discover-with each passing year- what it means to be church at Matariki

Looking ahead to the year ahead, I want us to look back briefly, as there are three sermons that I want to commend to you again. That's right, not one, not two, but three sermons all shaped by The Lord's Spirit which encourages and challenges us in our personal walk as Followers of Jesus.

These three sermons did not take on any political or cultural issue, rather they speak to each of us as individuals. These three sermons didn't speak to any deep issue within the church, rather they spoke deeply to our hearts as individuals who follow Jesus. Nor did these three sermons bog us down in theological wranglings and complex statements, rather they spoke with a purity and a gentleness to us as followers of Jesus.

I will not add to their words, rather I will let their words stand. I have all three sermons printed out, at the back, and they will be sent out this week.

The first is a message preached by Malcolm, in fact, this is actually, a historic moment, as this is actually the second time, I have revisited his sermon on today's readings! It was a sermon preached three years ago; on the very readings we heard today. I could not add to his words, so today I commend his sermon to you, as his words are just as timely today, as they were then,

At the end of his message, which is printed out for you to take, and which will be sent out this week, he shared the following points,

- *Ensure you tend to the garden of your heart, keep it soft receptive soil for the seed of God - ie the word of God.*
- *Tend to the word, God's seed. Remove the birds, the stones, and the weeds. Don't allow yourself to be deceived, distracted, or tested by trials and tribulations. Grow roots in your relationship with Christ that will allow you to endure.*
- *Ensure the holy spirit dwells in you and take encouragement.*
- *Remember God's word shall not return to him void and that you are his fruit of his word – rejoice in it!*

In the past two weeks, both Glenys and Phil preached on what the Lord would have had them preach on, and I want to encourage you to revisit these sermons in the coming week. I commend them to you, as Spirit-breathed words of hope, joy, freedom, and life.

Glenys, who we continue to pray for, as she recovers in hospital, shared with us two weeks ago that;

We are known intimately, and even the hairs on our heads are counted. Jesus has promised to acknowledge us, identify with us, be with us, strengthen us, speak through us, care for us and reward both us and those who choose to care for us. He meets our vulnerability with his power and presence.

Although he does not promise to ward off danger and keep us safe and happy in a protective cocoon, he does promise that we will never be forgotten or abandoned and that at the end, nothing that we could ever encounter here on earth will outweigh the reward of being with him eternally.

We may feel vulnerable, exposed and fragile and fear what is coming next, but whatever comes, we have the promise of God's presence to strengthen us. Not only that, but we have the promise of his love.

In our neediest moments, Jesus' heart goes out to us with love. When we are suffering he comforts us as a parent comforting a child. We are his children and he assures us that everything is going to be okay..

So let us live like a prophet. Live like a righteous person. Face persecution with courage. Take up our cross and follow. And know we are loved. Everything is going to be okay. That is the promise of eternity.

Last week, Phil shared, as did Glenys, a gentle and encouraging message for us; again, I invite to read his words afresh. Phil concluded his message with scriptures, and it is fitting, as we head into a new week, and a new year that we let them be a foundation and a guide for us.

Matthew 11: 28-30

28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

John 6:35

35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

John 7:37-38

37 “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”

Philippians 3:13-14

Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

I cannot express my thanks to, not only Malcolm, Glenys, and Phil, but for Michelle, Colin, Frodo and Kaz for the words of encouragement, challenge, hope, grace, joy, love, and promise that they have preached to us over the past year.

While they are words preached in the past, they are words that are part of our foundation as we step into the new year ahead.