

Sermon 2 July 2023 Heni Te Kirikaramu

Romans 12:17-21 Matthew 10:40-42

I quote from the last verse of our gospel reading, *'Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.'* A few weeks ago, 29th April to be exact, we celebrated someone in our Anglican calendar who literally brought a cup of water to a suffering enemy. Her name is Heni Te Kirikaramu and this is her story.

On the 29th April 1864, three hundred Maori were entrenched in a fortress at Gate Pa in the Tauranga area. They were surrounded by a force of 1500 British troops. Twice during the day, the British had almost succeeded in breaching the walls of the fort, but each time they were driven back. At the end of the day, they fell back to their own lines, leaving many of their comrades dead or wounded on the battlefield. During the night, a badly wounded British officer, Colonel Booth, called out for water. His cry was heard by Heni Te Kirikaramu, one of the Maori women who supported the defendants in the pa. She crept down the hill to a small stream, filled a can with water, then crept back to where the wounded officer lay and gave him a drink. In her own words:

When I placed Colonel Booth's head on my knee, I said, 'Here is water.' He drank and said, 'Thank you. God bless you.' I went to three other soldiers and gave them water one by one in the same way, then placing the can so it wouldn't spill, I ran back to the pa.

Most of the Maori defenders escaped from Gate Pa, but many of them were killed during a later battle at nearby Te Ranga. One who died was a chief, who also happened to be a student at the Anglican Mission. His name was Henare Wiremu Taratoa. On his body the soldiers found a set of written orders instructing his people how they were to fight in the battle, orders which Heni fulfilled to the letter. They were not to harm women or children or those who were unarmed or wounded. And at the bottom of the orders, Henare had written, *'If thine enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him a drink.'* Romans 12:20. These words, taken from our first reading, also echo our gospel reading.

We do live in a rather unsettled world at the moment, and we do see human nature, sometimes at its worst, but fortunately sometimes at its best. I am reminded of a very powerful image emanating out of the Black Lives Matter protests in the USA a couple of years ago. The image, captured by a photographer, is that of a black protester carrying on his shoulder a protester from the other side, a member of the white far right movement. These guys were there to cause all sorts of trouble for the Black Lives Matter protestors. This particular chap had got into some trouble in all the mayhem and his life was in danger. His mates had apparently left him to his own devices, so this large, muscular black protestor lifts him up on to his shoulder and carries him to safety.

I was looking closely at the photo of this on-line. The expression on this guy's face is hilarious. What's happening here? This is not meant to be happening! It is a very powerful image. These guys on the far right preach a message of hate and yet here we have the target of this man's hate offering him a little TLC, in fact heaps of TLC and probably saving him from a rather unpleasant fate. It's beautiful!

I would venture to say that he has done more than just bring him a cup of water, as Jesus puts it, and his reward is undoubtedly an immense sense of peace of mind and well-being that would flow into him as a result of this very noble act, not to mention the countless accolades that have come his way.

Going back to Heni Te Karamu's gesture of kindness. Now that's living out the gospel. Unfortunately, we do live in a world permeated by discord, and dare I say it, even hate over race, creed and politics. But there are beacons of light amongst the darkness, and that gives me hope. It is my prayer that those beacons will become floodlights, casting attitudes of hostility and judgment into the outer darkness where they belong. It is my prayer that our world will be blessed with leaders who embrace reconciliation rather than division. It is my prayer that the gospel message of respecting and caring for one another, even if they happen to be different to us, will be embraced by everyone.

I do believe this will happen. I do believe we will see change. I do believe that people will come to see that the ideology and principles as espoused by Jesus Christ are not only relevant, but in fact are essential, if we are to live in a world where we can feel comfortable and secure. It might necessitate a long journey but let's be part of that journey.

John said, *'Let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions.'* 1 John 3:18. And remember this, treating others with respect speaks volumes about you. Let me finish with a story that sheds some light on this observation.

This scene took place on a British Airways flight between Johannesburg and London. A white woman, about 50 years old was seated next to an African black man. She was disturbed by this and summoned the air hostess. 'Madam, what is the matter?' the hostess asked. 'Don't you see?' the woman replied, 'I do not agree to sit next to someone who is plainly inferior to me. I need an alternative seat.'

The hostess said, 'Be calm please. I will speak to the captain but almost all the seats on this flight are taken.' A few minutes later she returned, 'Madam, just as I thought, there no other seats available in economy class or business class. However, there is a seat available in First Class. The captain agrees that no one should be made to sit next to someone so repugnant.' She then turned to the African and said, 'So sir, if you would like to get your baggage and follow me. A seat awaits you in First Class.' The icing on the cake in this story is that those fellow passengers who had witnessed this whole exchange broke out in applause.

So you see, there is hope! The final word goes to Jesus himself, *'Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.'* John 13:35.

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