

Mo te iwi mo te Ao¹

For the People for the World

Exo 3:1-15 Rom 12:9-21 Matt 16:21-28

Introduction

Acknowledging the passing of Dolly Parton.

I almost didn't make it here this morning, but I tumbled out of bed and stumbled to the kitchen, I poured myself a cup of ambition, I yawned and stretched and tried to come to life. Jumped in the shower and the blood started pumping out on the street the traffic started jumping with folks like me on the job from 9 to 5..It would be remiss for me not to acknowledge the passing of Dolly Parton a songwriter, philanthropist, businesswoman, devout in her faith, who overturned labels and opinions others placed on her, she was an inspiration for all woman and was a source inspiration for me may she rest in peace and rise in glory.

I want to talk to us today about relationship. Relationship with God, with one another, with place and this world we are called to love and serve.

For many of us as Māori, and for those who have ever taken a Māori language course, one of the first things we are taught is tikanga Māori 101: the pepehā. Your pepehā is a cultural identifier and locator. You've likely heard one before it goes like this

Ko such and such te Maunga, my mountain is...Ko Hikurangi

Ko such and such te Awa, my river is...Ko Waiapu

Ko such and such te Iwi, my people are...Ko Ngati Porou

And to this you can add marae, hapū, waka and before you name is ever given hearers of your pepehā are given the opportunity to make connections with you. It is the beginnings of learning and sharing your whakapapa (genealogy).

A pepehā is not just a recital. It is not just information. It is where we first state our relationship to land and water, of ancestors and descendants, of belonging and responsibility. It is the beginnings of a story of long-standing connection to place and people. Opening a doorway for our children, so that even if they have not yet stood on that land or sat on that marae, they can still know there is a place where they are connected, remembered, and welcomed.

And there is much to explore in that. Even the word iwi carries a depth that the English word tribe does not fully hold. Iwi comes from the Maori world kōiwi which means bones therefore Iwi is more accurately described as the bones you are descended from.

¹ Taken from Te Oranga Ake mo te Iwi mo te Ao: Human Flourishing for all people of the world
The Very Rev'd Ruihana Paenga, Dean of Waiapu Cathedral, Archdeacon Takitimu. 9/8/2026

It matters, because language shapes how we see one another. If we only use shallow words, we may settle for shallow relationships. But the gospel calls us to look deeper. It calls us beyond labels, convenience and politeness, into a life where we actually belong to one another.

So when we speak of iwi, we are not simply speaking of a social group or category. We are speaking of the bones from which we come, the lives that have formed us, the people whose breath has shaped our own. This way of being of living and believing can help us to truly know what Christ means to live for his sake and for the sake of others.

In Exodus, Moses is drawn aside by a bush that burns but is not burned up, God tells him to remove his sandals for he is on Holy Ground he says to Moses “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” God places Moses within his whakapapa within relationship, he is reminded that God is not an abstract idea, God is the God of ancestors, of history and covenant.

God says “I have observed the misery of my people. I have heard their cry. I know their sufferings. I have come down to deliver them.” The God that speaks to Moses is a God who sees, hears, knows, and comes near to help. A God whose holiness is not separate from suffering, but present within it.

That is where relationship begins to cost Moses he cannot stay a spectator, through God he has heard the cry of the people and he is drawn into God’s mission. E te whanau relationship requires a response, it asks something of us, to pay attention, to be changed, and sometimes to go where we would rather not go. Relationship requires risk, the risk of suffering, the risk of being vulnerable, the risk of shame and rejection I wish I could tell you there is an easy way to deal with these things but I cannot.

In today’s Gospel reading Peter struggles with this.

Jesus begins to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and be resurrected. Peter cannot bear it. He takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. And we can understand Peter, because who among us wants their loving leader to lead through suffering? Who wants the path of faithfulness to include vulnerability, rejection and shame? But this doesn’t mean that suffering is good in itself. It doesn’t mean we should romanticise pain or allow for injustice.

It means that love, when it is real, will not remain untouched by the pain of the world. It means that God’s compassion, God’s justice, is a love that costs. And so when Jesus says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” We must understand how to find our own cross and what it means to take it up. For some of us that is an ongoing, lifelong journey of learning and sharing.

That cross may be different from person to person, that cross became real at the point that you realised there was something missing from your life and it was the story, sacrifice and presence of a small Jewish man, from a time long ago and a place far removed. And by giving yourself through your time at church, in fellowship with others, in study, in prayer you were giving yourself to this relationship, you might call it a faith relationship but it is much more than that, through a relationship with Christ, he leads you on a journey of strengthening loving relationships with God and with your neighbours, your community from all socio-economic backgrounds.

And you may soon realise that cross is a symbol of how to restore relationship, how to restore justice, how to restore compassion and healing it is a symbol of how to restore love and Gods great plan for the world.

In Romans Paul gives us a picture of what that costly love looks like in the everyday life of a community. “Let love be genuine,” he says. “Kia ū ki te pai, hold fast to what is good.” Love one another with mutual affection. Outdo one another in showing honour. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.”

If a pepehā teaches us to locate ourselves in relation to mountain, river, and people, then the gospel asks us: how are we locating ourselves as the body of Christ? What is our tikanga as a Cathedral community, Cathedral 101? What are the practices that tell people, not just with words but with our life together, that here they will find genuine love, where love and relationship is not only on the surface, that we rejoice in hope, that we persevere and are patient in suffering, that we contribute to the needs of not only ourselves but to the whole community and to the whole world.

Perhaps Cathedral 101 begins here: genuine love is not performative love, not comfortable love, not love that only welcomes people who already know the rules. Genuine love is love that listens before it speaks deep listening not deep ignoring. Love that learns people’s names. Love that makes room for grief and joy. Love that honours different stories. Love that refuses to reduce people to labels. Love that says: you are not a visitor you are a member of this family and you welcome here. Love that costs.

One of the most important things I was told before I was made a priest was this, it is not about you, my calling is not about me, it is about everyone but me.

And perhaps Cathedral 101 also means remembering that it is not about us. It is not about protecting our comfort, our preferences, our habits, or our reputation. It is about Christ. It is about the people God hears crying out. It is about the world God so loves. It is about becoming a community that is not only gathered for ourselves, but sent for the sake of others.

“Mo te iwi, mo te ao” — for the people, for the world — is not simply a beautiful phrase. It is a calling.

Today e te whanau as Moses did may we hear God calling us by name, may we have the courage to enter the holy ground. May we resist the temptation to seek a faith without cost. May our love be genuine, our relationships honest and our welcome wide spread. And may this Cathedral be known not only as a place where the people enter, but as a place where the people are sent out for the sake of Christs love for Gods people and Gods world.

And I leave you with these words in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
Amen.