

Hope from Tikanga Maori

A Conversation with Lyndon Drake – Archdeacon in the Diocese of Te Tai Tokelau (Auckland)

Held at Mangere on 31 August 2022 with Francis Noordanus

Sponsored by the Anglican Community of St Mark.

Q: What is God doing in this season in your assignment Lyndon?

When I came to this Archdeaconry it had one person in full time stipendary ministry
The markers in attendance and baptism were all in decline

I concluded the first priority was proclamation of the Gospel starting in Manukau. Advice sought from then lead of CMS Steve Maina. We sought to have Maori confident in the Gospel. Financial support came from CMS and elsewhere.

Mangere has 7 local marae. Two evangelists have connected well with them.

Q: What have we seen happen?

Many Maori already have link to the Gospel and the Church. The dynamic is like Acts where households/whare come to faith. This is immensely encouraging.

Q: What is the message or Gospel theme that is resonating today?

Firstly a corrective on the 19th century experience acknowledging the impact of salvation.

In this line today some Maori are engaging dangerous spiritual forces.

The questions of identity are being addressed. Being Maori often brings a burden around needing to prove or demonstrate that. The Gospel eases this by centring identity on being in-Christ. Seeking to tell a better story than the secular version of being Maori.

Q: What sort of responses and outworking are there as the Gospel is embraced?

God has intervened in people's lives and brought transformation. It's complex in a corporate society so we are working with a whole community. In our setting there is a work to integrate Maoritanga into Christian Theology. It must not be syncretism but about paying attention to a cultural setting to recognise what Christ means here.

Sprouts are coming up but are they first fruits or seed on stony ground?

There is some fruit around cultural artifacts. Music is important and we need to see this develop well. Kapa haka clubs are important in this.

Q: What are some points of resistance or suspicion to the Gospel in Marae?

Actually we are quite welcome on Marae, for example especially around Tangi.

There is high spiritual trust. While people may have a denominations or sectarian preference they are all open to Karakia and the service happening.

So instead of bringing the Gospel and expecting response, we go as servants. This stance includes going when asked. In most marae there is an open door. There is a ripe harvest field, I only need workers.

We have no funds but the open door is there.

It's easier to raise money from Australia than in the Anglican Church in this province.

Q: Considering Belonging, Believing and Behaving? When does the challenge of the Gospel break out?

We have a liberty in Maori circles to speak the Gospel in ways that are not possible elsewhere. I believe that if this is fruitful it will be fruitful for more than only Maori. We are not creating a club for ourselves. A korowai (cloak) may create a cover for much wider Gospel reception than just Maori. A motivating conviction but held lightly.

Q: 'The broken story' What is this?

The Story of St James Church as it here in Mangere illustrates this...

At one point in 19th century 40% of population (Maori) were in regular worship.

There is no an exciting sense that the brokenness associated with St James is being healed.

For this pain to be overcome is highly significant.

The pakeha Minister at St James is now accepted as the minister for the local marae.

Service is central in the ministry of presence.

Is there a structural pattern that is emerging as effective for Maori today?

Surprise – the parish has currency for Maori – local church works.

St James Mangere works because it has natural constraints where community is naturally focused.

Lyndon considers the way forward is to multiply those who can lead parish ministry.

I want to see many people ordained and committed to local church communities.

Would you cover the whole map or just key centres?

Ans: If I could I would cover the whole map!

Q: What did you mean by "Be careful"?

There is a spiritual dimension. The ability to perceive is not universal. It's not a neutral environment with both good and evil. The danger is that in attempting cultural recovery there is a real risk of encountering powers that are dangerous. It's reported that this does lead to madness.

Happily we are not dependent on our own power but God's power.

Q: What might we learn from Tikanga Maori about what Maori culture offers in bringing the Gospel?

Tikanga Maori is a structural complication.

A different experience and place in society attunes one to different Gospel issues.

Esau McCaulley - US Reading about black Christians explore how we read same scriptures with same heart but are sensitised differently. Justice is a major concern for Maori. Racism is painfully embedded in NZ. Every person in Lyndon's churches have regularly experienced racism.

Ways of explaining the Gospel are highly attenuated to Western individuals. NT Wright's celebration of Jesus as King moves us beyond that. From Pakeha there is help to avoid syncretism.