

With ANZAC Day occurring this past week, I remembered a story that my grandmother, (who we called Gay) told me, about what it was like living in New Zealand during the Second World War. My grandparents were in Auckland when the war broke out and NZ declared for Britain. My grandfather was an early volunteer and went off to camp soon after.

Left with a two very small daughters, a 6-year-old and the other not yet 1, Gay decided it would be best to head home to family in Christchurch. There at least she would be with her Mum and 3 sisters, one of whose husband's was also in camp getting training to be off overseas.

The hardest thing she said, during the 6 years my grandfather was away, (my Mum had no memory of her dad at all when he came home, he had been gone that long). Was not the rationing, or the scrimping and saving, it wasn't the war time restrictions or regulations about what you could do or where you could go, and when. It wasn't even the fear of losing the war, although that was pretty bad, it was the fear that Poppa might not come home ...

and the longing she carried, for all that time, to see him again.

...

In last week's Herald on Sunday there was a story on the inside front cover, about a lesbian couple who wanted to get married. The fly in the ointment, was that one of the couple is a resident of New Zealand, but a citizen of India, and she wants a big fat Indian wedding, but same sex marriages are not yet legal in India. While they are here, no Indian, Hindu I presume, Priest would perform the ceremony, so Akhua Sharma longs for a big fat Indian wedding, and recognition as a person in her home nation.

...

All of us at some stage or other have longed for things. A home. A child. A partner. A reconciliation. A cure. Hope. A second chance. We all know what longing looks like. We see it in faces around about us, as we walk the streets, go to Westfield's or at work. We see it on the news every night. The longing of a Prince for a throne. Of Ukrainians; longing for peace, safety, and security. Of Palestinians, longing for a homeland. People in many parts of the world; Russia, North Korea, Belarus, and China, to name just a few ... longing for democracy.

...

Our gospel reading is an articulation of the longing of Israel for a Shepherd King. A longing present in many places in the first testament but plainly promised in our reading from Psalm 23. The one who promises life without want. Lying down in green pastures. Still waters and a restoration of our souls. Guidance through the darkest places, without fear. Provision even before our enemies. Goodness and mercy. All promised in these 6 beautiful verses.

And then in our gospel reading John says Jesus fulfils these hopes of Israel for a good shepherd. For the protection, wholeness, safety, and care that that shepherd would bring.

That shepherd whose voice his people will recognise, and follow. That shepherd, who knows each of his sheep by name. That shepherd whose tender care will be obvious to all that are in contact with him, who in their following and listening and being known, become God's own people.

This shepherd who promises abundant life; living water, bread of life, light of the world, gate to glory, shelter for the ages. This abundant life, the shepherd says, is for everyone ... all that is needed is that it be accepted. Simply received.

...

Whether we long for an absent husband and father, an Indian wedding, a throne, a place, a land of our own, an identity as a people ... all of us at some time have longed for something.

For love or peace. For hope or joy. For safety, security, or stability, so that we may live in contentment and freedom.

Whatever we long for, our reading from the gospel says to us that the place to start and finish in the satisfying of that longing ... is with the Shepherd King of Israel, Jesus the Christ.

This Jesus who promises abundant life. A life where we are known. Where our name is known. Where his leading and guiding, speaking, and loving, is tender and gentle and protective. Where eternal water and bread and light, an open gate and shelter for all, are promised us.

In spite of what we see around us, in spite of those that come to steal and kill and destroy, sometimes even in the guise of shepherds themselves, in spite of everything, we are called to trust in him. Believing that in the end, the one who lays down his life for the sheep ... is the one worthy to be followed.

...

We all long. The world longs. History ... even seems too long.

For a Shepherd who will do right. Be right ... and stay right ... forever.

John tells us ... this Shepherd ... is Jesus ...

Amen.