

You learn a lot working with people. When I first left the Baptist Ministry I worked for the Department of Corrections as a Programme Facilitator. It was my job to run what were called criminogenic programmes. Programmes designed to help people stop committing offenses. And one of these programmes was called Straight Thinking. It was a good programme, designed to give those who did it some skills in planning and organization. Consequences and the like.

One of the modules was on goal setting, and this was always an illuminating one to be involved in. I would have anywhere from 8-15 people of all ages and ethnicities, sitting in a semi-circle, and I would ask them a question. "If you could be anyone in the world, who would you be?" This was back in 2005, when the world's richest man was Bill Gates, so the unfailing answer from almost everyone, was Bill!

When we got through everyone talking about how good it was to be the richest man in the world, I would say to them. "Well, there can really only be one Bill Gates, so, if you can't be him who would you be?"

I was almost always greeted, with a stony silence.

If they couldn't be Bill Gates, they had no idea of who they could be.

These guys and girls had no concept of working with what they had. With who they were. No idea of what to do with themselves, in the place they were found that day, and using that to move forward.

Today is Te Pouhere Sunday, and it is to celebrate looking back to the establishment of the Anglican Church of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Polynesia, as a three tikanga church. Which is great, it is, and was, a great thing.

But what are we working with now? What is Te Pouhere Sunday, for us today, looking forward, working with what we have now?

Our world has changed in so many ways over the past 18 months, but one of the big changes has come in the Black Lives Matter movement. This movement has brought race and racism into the forefront of the world's conversation once again. And we have found that for some, not a lot has changed.

But here in NZ things are different, aren't they? In a few months we will have our very first Maori Woman Governor General. We have had a Maori man acting Prime Minister, a Maori man as Governor General. The Treaty of Waitangi is becoming more and more prominent in our culture and society. Things here are good, aren't they? They are changing? ...

On that Straight Thinking programme, most of the people were Maori. More than half of the people in gaol in NZ are Maori.

A lovely young couple that Janet and I know. On the property ladder with two beautiful kids. Both high school teachers, one in fact a deputy principal, were out shopping in a major mall near where they grew up, and they happened to go in to a large shop. As they entered, they noticed that one of the people behind the counter lifted up her arm and pointed. They didn't pay much attention, until after a minute or two they noticed that another of the shop assistants was keeping a very close eye on them.

You see, these two beautiful young people are Maori, and therefore by definition ... thieves.

We also know someone, who when they go to the petrol station, always has to get out of their car and pay before they fill up. This is spite of being a person who owns her own home and has responsible full-time employment, as well as being a fine mother and grandmother.

You see this beautiful, hardworking and middle-class woman ... is Maori, and therefore by definition ... a thief.

Things here are good, aren't they? They are changing? ...

We need to work with what we have.

Te Pouhere Sunday is a reminder of what we have done. But let's not leave it there, let's look at where we are today and use that to move forward. Let's work with what we have to make it better. In our church and in our communities.

2 Corinthians 5 asks us to live for Jesus and to see things from his point of view. To regard people from God's standpoint. Matt 7 says that if we do this, we will be wise men and women, like houses planted on rock, not tossed around by waves.

Isaiah 42 gives us hope, saying that even if we don't know where we are going, God will lead us by the right road, God will guide us.

This is good news for Te Pouhere Sunday, as we work with what we have; that God will guide us. That darkness will not be a problem. Rough ground will be made smooth. That God will do these things for us. God will not forsake us.

But the thing is, it's even better news, that God's not just doing these things for us, God is doing this for the benefit of Maori!

Thanks, be to God.

Amen.