

Matariki Sermon

I am a beginner. I am learning.

How might we as a church approach and understand Matariki?

- I am aware that we all come with different understandings regarding how we might engage with Matariki. For many, it may seem like this has become very big, very quickly into our cultural awareness. It could be easy to brush it all off out of unfamiliarity.
- I have wanted to approach this with a hermeneutic of generosity, wondering how I can learn and grow. To ask, how might this celebration bring us back to things that we have forgotten in our modern, secular world? To think about how we might better locate Christian Spirituality in the Southern Hemisphere, in Aotearoa.

So the conversations I have had over the last couple of weeks with different people, is what are the main Kaupapa or principles of Matariki, and **how might Matariki help us better live into our Christian faith?**

Genesis 1:14: And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years."

There is a rhythm and pattern to the natural world which is a gift for us to be connected to the wider cosmos. We in the modern world have largely become disconnected from the rhythms of the cycle of seasons, of life, of food production. Genesis here suggests that whatever other cosmic purpose stars have for God, they are signs for us to mark seasons and days and years.

Bosco Peters writes "Many urbanised, westernised people have little connection to nature and the changes in our sky. Many could not name what phase of the Moon we are in, how the Moon waxes and wanes, or point out the planets (and stars) in our night sky."

The flattening of the modern world

When we look at back across time and across cultures, we see that our modern, industrial world is an anomaly. The project of Modernism has been a project of desacralisation, of removing sacredness, mystery and connectedness from how we understand our world and our place in it. We have pursued what Charles Taylor called the "Immanent Frame." We live in a disenchanted world. We have flattened time and space in a materialist understanding of

the world. There is a sense that we have disconnected ourselves off from ideas of sacred place, and sacred rhythms of time. As a result, and along with some technological advances (which I am not necessarily complaining about), we have become increasingly disconnected from the rest of creation, from nature, from our sources of food. From the rhythms and cycles of the year. Of course, we are waking up more, thanks to climate change, to our connectedness with Creation. However, often our solution from this frame, is that it is a technical problem with a technical solution, rather than thinking about re-orienting our relationship with creation.

What is Matariki?

So with that in mind, what is Matariki and how might it help push back against this vision of the world? Matariki marks the reappearance of the Pleiades constellation in the dawn winter sky, marking the beginning of the Māori year. Different hapu or iwi will observe it differently depending on what stars can be seen in their region. For example, many iwi look for Puanga (Rigel in the Orion constellation) at this time as Lorinda did in the video.

Hapu would have specially trained individuals (tohunga kōkōurangi) who were trained from a young age to make sense of the stars based on the inherited matauranga, or Māori wisdom and knowledge. The stars were seen as a mirror of what is happening on earth, and the belief is held that they have an effect. Depending on the brightness of the various stars that make up the constellation, they would forecast for the year ahead, particularly thinking about their sources of food, and whether the coming seasons would be fruitful or a struggle.

Three main Kaupapa

1. Rest, Gathering, Eating

Matariki ahunga nui. - The great mounds of Matariki.

As the Teacher says in Ecclesiastes, there is A time to plant and a time to harvest. A time to be quiet, and a time to speak. There is a time for embracing, and a time to refrain from embracing.

Wintering together through the coldest darkest days of the year, it was a time that whanau would huddle together close, to keep each other warm, to conserve energy for the season. It would be a time of reflecting and sharing stories.

About gathering in and storing the harvest, when the kumura were stored in large stockpiles and shared amongst the community. It would also be a time that the tohunga kōkōrangī, would look to the stars of Matariki, to determine whether it would be a fruitful harvest or a year of struggle. To determine the where and when of each harvest.

Because of this, it was also a time for rest. Nohopuku. Silence. Rest for the season ahead. Often in our modern world, with our electricity, warm homes, cars and cups of tea, we can ignore the natural limitations of winter. As we have flattened time, we think well, we have the same 24 hours of the day, why can't I get as much done as at any other time of the year? When we think like this, we have lost touch with even the most basic rhythms of time. Matariki can be a good reminder us of the things we may have lost touch with, but is right there in scripture, to live more in sync with the natural rhythms of the year. As I mentioned earlier, harvest and seasons and food were integral to all the holidays and festivals of the ancient Israelites, that Jesus celebrated. Matariki can be an important reminder to locate ourselves in time and place here in Aotearoa, as it is our only public holiday that is connected to nature. What is the invitation in this idea for you?

2. Remembrance of the dead

Ko Matariki te kaitō i te hunga pakeke ki te pō. - Matariki draws the frail into the night.

Again, as The Preacher in Ecclesiastes says, there is a season for every activity under the sun, a time to be born, and a time to die, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. Matariki is a time when all the *mate*, all those who have died over the past year are remembered collectively. It is a time for reflection of the year prior. A time of communal grieving for the dead. Not just our family, but friends. Or even the losses we are preparing for (Henare). It was the one time where all were together for the sake of mourning. Of course, each individual family grieves their deceased, but this was the time where the grieving is done publicly and together. I am reminded of a line from the poem that I have heard many times here at St George's, and is a part of our value as being a place of grace.

If this is not a place where tears are understood,

Where do I go to cry?

We remember Jesus' words: Blessed (truly happy) are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Perhaps we might add, especially blessed are those who mourn together. Matariki reminds us to be a people who grieve together. To mourn with those who mourn.

Our deceased loved ones continue to shape us. They don't remain in the past but play an active role in the ongoing day-to-day life of those who mourn. This is not just an individual thing, communities that cry and remember together help one another construct meaning out of the lives of the deceased. It is a time to tell stories. For me, this weekend has been a reminder to tell the stories of my grandparents, to pass on who they were to my girls.

Of course, we have in the Christian tradition an analogy to this. It is the three-day feast of Allhallowtide, with Hallow's Eve, All Saints and All Souls Day. While perhaps we don't observe it as well as we might, this is a time to remember the dead, including martyrs, saints and all our beloved departed as a community. A friend I spoke to get gain knowledge about matariki said he thought celebrating matariki might be a helpful antidote to the culture of amnesia we have in our modern world, where we don't take the time to look back, to think and talk about those who have gone before us.

3. Looking forward to the year ahead – (Resurrection, Resolution)

Kua haehae ngā hihi o Matariki. - The rays of Matariki are spread.

It is a time for a new beginnings. Matariki is a time to share stories, reflect on the past, and plan for the future. Often, since the older kuia and kaumatua might have died during the winter, it is a time where new leadership and vision would emerge within a hapu.

As Lorinda said in that video, she said Matariki for her is ultimately about having a fresh encounter with the Lord. To reflect, where are we at Lord? To get real, and to ask, where are we heading together? To take stock, to reflect and consider what conditions they may have put on following Jesus.

There is a time and a season for everything under the sun, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to starch and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend.

There is a time to look back, rest, reflect and remember, but also a time to put our hand to the plough and not look back. To make resolutions. To commit to what is next without

condition. This is a great time to get real with the Lord, and say, okay. Where to next? As the days slowly start to get longer and warmer, what are you inviting me to now? (fork in the path?)

Conclusion

Different aspects of this will touch each of us differently this morning. What I hoped I have shown is how there are ways we can take some of the principles of Matariki, to locate our Christian spirituality more deeply in our time and place. And perhaps, to be reminded of things that we may have lost in our modern, materialist world. There is a line a few verses after the Ecclesiastes reading which says in the ESV, verse 15, *“God seeks what has been driven away.”* I wonder, if there is an invitation here in this holiday, this celebration, to wonder if there is something God might be seeking for us that has been driven away or forgotten in our modern world, but is there in our traditions, in our scriptures, in our history, even in our hymns from 100-200 years ago as Josh mentioned. Something that

- 1) more deeply connects us to the rhythms of the natural world we find ourselves in, to the sources of our food, inviting us to **rest**.
- 2) helps us better **remember** together the ‘great cloud of witnesses that has gone before us.’
- 3) reminds us to carve out time for encounter, and ask the Lord, ‘where are we heading together?’ and **resolving** to walk in **resurrection, new life**.

And of course, these three Kaupapa of Matariki: rest, remembrance, and resolutions in the hope for new life, are at the very heart of our faith. In our gospel reading, Jesus is gathered with his friends for a festival holiday, around a meal. A meal remembering the Exodus, but also deeply connected to the season and the harvest. Located in time and place. At this meal which he had eagerly anticipated, we see Jesus in a posture of rest, reclining at table. Not only are they remembering the Exodus, but Jesus also invites the disciples to take the bread he has given them in remembrance of him. Likewise, the meal anticipates the resurrection new life in the kingdom of God. Jesus won’t eat the Passover again until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. He won’t drink wine again until the kingdom of God comes. So, when we come to the table this morning, we all gather around food, a sacred meal, and enter into the warmth of Christ’s rest and embrace. We come not alone but as a community, as an extended whanau of Christ, we huddle together for we cannot make it

through the dark times alone. We come in remembrance, not only of Christ, but all those who have gone before us; and we encounter Christ, where he may ask us, where are we heading together?

Response

So what we are going to do now is move into a time of response, and I wanted to focus our response on a time of remembrance and collective grieving.

Who are we mourning?

- Loved ones who have passed
- Those who be approaching death
- Those you still mourn however long it has been but a still very much part of our hearts
- Those who felt you didn't have a chance to mourn properly during lockdown
- Around the world as we mourn those who have died (NZ road tolls, gun violence, flooding in India, Bangladesh, China, earthquake in Afghanistan).

I will start with a prayer, and then we will take some time as the music is playing to reflect, and write a name or names on a star, which we bring forward during communion. There will also be an opportunity to light a candle as you do so.

Let us Pray: Gracious God, as we contemplate the stars of Matariki, we clearly see that every part of creation has its origin and purpose in you. We give you thanks that you have given life to our ancestors, grandparents, and parents, so that they may transmit life to us. Bestow your graces abundantly upon them so that we may in our turn inherit their blessings. As we remember the past, we take the opportunity to bring to you our hopes and dreams for the future. May they bear fruit in your name. We ask this through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.