

Inclusion

Acts 10-11

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This morning I want to talk about *inclusion*- which I think is quite an *appropriate topic* to preach about on *Waitangi weekend*, as New Zealanders celebrate the radically inclusive treaty upon which our nation is founded.

Yet inclusion is also quite a *controversial topic* to preach on given what's going in other parts of the world!

According to Acts chapters 10 and 11: *the Holy Spirit comes as a sign of God's inclusion of everyone who believes in the power of a great covenant between the Father and the Son.*

Exclusion doesn't work! (Crocodile Hunter)

But first let me give you an example of the *opposite of inclusion - exclusion*- by describing what happened when *salt water crocodiles* were excluded from the rivers of *Far North Queensland*.

I learned about this while on holiday when I read *The Last Crocodile Hunter* by *Bob Irwin* (father of *Steve Irwin* and founder of *Australia Zoo*).

In the wake of World War 2 the .303 rifle became the *weapon of choice* for *hunting crocodiles*, as a lucrative new trade in crocodile hides took off. In a mere 30 years, salt water crocodiles were almost hunted to *extinction* by hunters with 303s!

But in 1974 the crocodile slaughter was *halted* when both *freshwater* and *saltwater crocodiles* became *protected species* in Queensland, which was the last state in Australia to introduce this law.

Fortunately one of the amazing things about the creatures of God's creation is that if you give them a chance they're incredibly efficient at restoring themselves.

Crocodiles are testament to this, as their numbers slowly recovered after hunting them was made illegal.

By 1985 their rising population in Far North Queensland had recovered to the point where they'd become a problem for farmers who didn't like having their cattle *eaten by crocs!*

According to *Bob Irwin* it wasn't a case of *crocodiles encroaching on populated areas* as it was *humans encroaching on the crocodile's territory!*

Since the *Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services* didn't have the manpower or expertise to handle crocodiles, they invited crocodile farms and zoos to apply for a license to remove and relocate crocodiles from the trouble spots of Northern Queensland.

Bob Irwin and his son *Steve* signed up almost *immediately* and headed up to *Cattle Creek* to start catching crocodiles for their reptile park. Bob had always wanted more saltwater crocodiles in their wildlife park but he'd refused to buy them from crocodile farms as a matter of principle.

And so began the now legendary career of *Bob and Steve Irwin* the original *crocodile hunters!*

One of the *biggest* they caught at Cattle Creek, was a grand old *four metre giant* that was known to *frighten the living daylight*s out of the local fishermen by surfacing next to them as they fished from their *three metre dinghies*!

"*Crikey mate, look at the size of em!*" Steve enthusiastically exclaimed when they finally caught the *oversized croc* in their *undersized trap*!

After a massive struggle getting him out of the trap and into a crate without being eaten, it was eventually safely on its way to the Irwin's reptile park.

However Bob and Steve sadly realised the impact that pulling this *king of the crocs* out of his kingdom would have.

The croc had undoubtedly been *the largest, strongest and most dominant* male in the area. As the CEO of Cattle Creek, it would've been doing a *very good job* of keeping the whole system *in check*. But with him *gone*, younger crocs would *run riot* and the system would now be *out of whack* because they'd removed its dominant *apex predator*.

By the time their contract to catch crocodiles was up, the Irwin's Reptile Park was *chock-a-block with crocs* and well on the way to becoming one of the *premier wildlife facilities in the world*, which is now known as *Australia Zoo*.

Thirty years after their crocodile catching expeditions to Far North Queensland had ended, *Bob Irwin* made a *nostalgic return* to *Cattle Creek*, where their croc catching adventures first began.

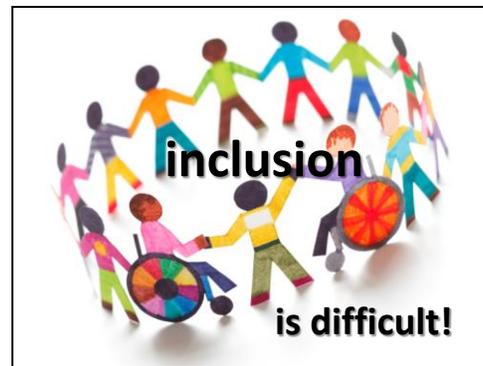
One of the farmers who'd helped them get started told him, "*You won't believe how many crocs are around here now Bob! You said that once you took out the CEO of the crocs then the teenagers would run rampant. Well, you were right! Nowadays, we see them walking across the road! They've lost all fear of people. Not like it used to be when you blokes first arrived.*"

What happened when the *Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services* tried *excluding* giant crocodiles from *Far North Queensland*,

is an illustration of how *exclusion doesn't work* in the natural world, *nor* is it likely to work in the *human world*!

Inclusion is difficult! (Treaty of Waitangi)

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Yet if *exclusion doesn't work* in the natural world and *unlikely to work in the human world*, *inclusion* is often quite *difficult*!

Take for example the circumstances that led to the *Treaty of Waitangi*.

Following the arrival of the missionaries in 1814 and *Samuel Marsden's* landmark sermon on Christmas Day at *Oihi Bay*, it took another 20 years before there was any evidence of social and spiritual change attributable to the gospel.

But in 1834 something *dramatic* began happening.

Maori who'd been captured and enslaved by *Ngapui* during the musket wars were *released* after attending Christian schools in the far north. These now *freed Christian Maori*, such as *Hakaraia* of *Waitaha iwi* here, returned home bringing the *Gospel message* back to their own people.

Essentially *Maori evangelised themselves* and from 1836 New Zealand was being lauded as *one of the most successful mission fields in the world*!

Maori were in the midst of a *cultural and spiritual revival*-peace, commerce and literacy were *breaking out everywhere*!

But then in 1839 the *New Zealand Company* founded by *Edward Gibbon Wakefield* arrived in New Zealand. Younger brother William had been sent out to purchase Maori land at the lowest price possible. Over a brief four month period Wakefield acquired 8 million hectares of land in Nelson, Wellington, and Taranaki. Having pre-sold land they did not own, largely to investors who would never live here, they also failed to properly consult the true owners of the land.

But before the ink was dry on the NZ Company's suspect dealings, boat loads of settlers were already on their way. In Wellington Maori were evicted from their homes with little concern for where they were now going to live or how they would feed their families. Within a few years the Maori population had declined as the settler population grew and Maori felt betrayed.

Yet the many economic refugees from England, Ireland and Scotland *also felt betrayed*. They had believed the New Zealand Company's *slick marketing promises* of land *ready and waiting to be farmed*, and a *prosperous life* at the edge of the world. But many ended up *labouring on public works programmes* or struggling with dense scrub to create a living space for their families.

In response to growing tension between Maori and the rising tide of settlers, instructions were issued by *James Stephen* of the *Colonial office* (nephew of anti-slavery law reformer William Wilberforce). *Governor Hobson* was instructed that Maori land rights and interests were to be *protected by a treaty*.

The Treaty (which we now call the Treaty of Waitangi). *In return for signing over governance or sovereignty, Queen Victoria promised Maori her protection, their equal rights alongside British citizens and "exclusive and "undisturbed possession of their lands, estates, fisheries and forests" for as long as they desired. They could however sell land, through the crown, at an agreed price thus making it possible for settlers to make their home in New Zealand.*

At the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi on 6th February 1840, Governor Hobson declared to each chief who had signed it,

"he iwi tahi tatou," We two peoples together make one nation".

The Treaty of Waitangi was understood as a *kawenata* or Covenant, made before God, between two peoples of equal status based on trust and relationship.

The future for both *Maori and Pakeha* looked bright on that first Waitangi day. But it wasn't long before the *humanitarian Christians* like *James Stephen* in the Colonial Office were gone and the *ethic of inclusion* embodied by the Treaty was *lost* along with any idea of Maori having a say in what was happening to their land. 177 years later history speaks for itself of how a well intended *treaty of inclusion* ended up often being ignored.

It stands as an example of how *difficult racial inclusion often is!*

Inclusion God's better way

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So if *exclusion doesn't work* in the natural world, and unlikely to work in the human world, and if *racial inclusion* is often difficult, *is there a better way?*

The Bible tells us there *certainly is!*

In Acts chapters 10 and 11 we read about the defining moment of this *better way*.

Cornelius was a *God fearing Roman Centurian*, stationed at *Caesarea*. One day he had a vision of angel who told him,

"Cornelius, Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been noticed by God. Now send some of your men to Joppa to bring back a man named Peter who is staying there".

Meanwhile as they were approaching Joppa the following day, Peter had gone up on the rooftop of the house he was staying at, to pray. While lunch was being prepared, he *fell asleep and dreamt of heaven being opened and large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four footed animals, reptiles and birds. Then a voice said to him, "Get up Peter, kill and eat!"*

"Surely not Lord!" Peter replied disgustedly.
"I've never eaten anything impure or unclean."

The voice from heaven replied, *"Do not call anything impure or unclean."* Three times this vision was repeated before the sheet was taken back up to heaven.

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of it, the Spirit said to him, *"Peter, three men are looking for you, go and meet them downstairs and go with them for I have sent them."*

Which is exactly what happened next!

So after the men had spent the night with Peter, they set off together for Caesaria the next day. Peter still had *no idea what was going on!*

Upon arriving at Cornelius's house Peter told the large gathering there about how it was *against the law for a Jew (like him) to associate with a Gentile (like Cornelius).*

"But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean so I have come without objection. Now may I'd like to know why you sent for me?", Peter asked them.

So Cornelius told Peter about how the angel who had told him to send his men to go and bring Peter to him. Then he said to Peter, *"Now we're all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."*

So Peter began to speak by saying, *"I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts people from every nation who revere him and do what is right."*

Peter continued preaching the good news to them about how God had sent his son Jesus, anointing him with the Holy Spirit's power to do good and to heal everyone who was under the devil's power.

He told them about how the people of Jerusalem had executed Jesus on a cross and how God had raised Jesus from the dead on the third day and how he and the other disciples had eaten and drunk with Jesus *after he'd risen from the dead!*

Peter also told them how Jesus had commanded them to preach to the people that *everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name.*

While Peter was still speaking *suddenly the Holy Spirit came upon everyone who was listening to the message. The Jewish believers accompanying Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles!*

They heard them *speaking in tongues and praising God!*

Peter then declared to them that, *"Since you have received the Holy Spirit just as we have we will baptize you in the name of Jesus Christ."*

After staying with them for a few days, Peter *returned to Jerusalem* where he *faced stern criticism* from the Jewish believers for going into the house of a Gentile and eating with them, which was against Jewish law.

So Peter explained exactly what had happened, concluding that, *"If God gave them as Gentile believers the same gift of the Holy Spirit as he gave us as Jewish believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who am I to think that I can oppose God?"*

When the Jewish believers heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, *"So then God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life!"*

*Exclusion doesn't work in the natural world,
and is unlikely to work in the human world,
Racial inclusion is often difficult to achieve,
but Spiritual inclusion (like what happened to the Gentile believers
in Acts 10), is God's better way!*

You see before the universe was created, God made an eternal covenant (or treaty) with the Son (as per John 6:39, Eph 1:3-5), where by the empowerment of the Spirit, God would send the Son into the world to become our saviour, through the sacrificial offering of Jesus on the cross.

According to Acts chapters 10 and 11 the *Holy Spirit comes as a sign of God's inclusion of everyone who believes in the power of this great covenant between the Father and the Son!*

This is God's better way!

This form of *inclusion* is *God's better way* that we remember and celebrate around the *communion table* this morning, by *eating the bread and drinking from the cup together!*

It's an *inclusive (not exclusive) table* we gather around this morning.

It's *inclusive* of everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, it *embraces* people of *all nationalities*, and of *both genders*, it's open to people *of all ages, and any vocation*, it's for both the wealthy and the poor, and the *unemployed* it includes people who are physically able as well as the disabled, there is no limitation or qualification to be met by social skills or intellectual capacity either.

The *communion table* around which we gather this morning is for *everyone who simply believes in Jesus as our Lord and saviour, through whom the destructive power of sin has been removed so that we may enter into eternity with God!*

This is God's inclusive way!