

Greetings Everybody to Saints A & A and beyond in some cases. This is Pastoral letter #3 through Lockdown 4 of COVID-19

24th April 2020 the day before ANZAC

We are told ANZAC commemorations will be different this year. We are invited to stand at the end of our driveways 6am before the dawn. *And we will remember.*

Many of us have first-hand memories of men and women and their stories who were in particular on what we remember as the Gallipoli Peninsula. We also remember many others in any number of wars in too many far off lands. *And we will remember.*

In the battle lines of COVID-19, there have been deaths in Aotearoa, those with and without COVID-19. We have commiserated that family could not have been with them in their fight for life. The family were not present in their last days and for many to commemorate their lives in ways we have always done is not possible.

‘We’ have suffered this agony before. In the First and Second world wars, our NZ troops were on the whole buried where they were killed, and many later moved to Commonwealth War graves shoulder to shoulder in foreign lands. At home, how did ‘we’ grieve the near 30,000 battle deaths? I am not sure if there is anything written on this part of our history?

I do however recall conversations with kaumatua (old people) of Ngāti Porou on the East Coast. They were children at the time without a care in the world. Not entirely without a care! Many of their menfolk had gone off to war, and that meant the ‘boys’ had to grow up fast. But what was stark, leaving deep scars of grief and bewilderment was tangi after tangi, and there wasn’t a Marae that didn’t face this excruciating time of sorrow, a tangi with no body of their beloved to mourn. Death and tangi are natural and regular occasions for rural and tribal life, even occasionally bodies lost at sea. Lost at sea, at least we knew where they were, and you could call out to your loved one on the beach and entreat Tangaroa (sea) to release your loved one, to hold them one last time before releasing them to Paptūānuku (Papa/Earth Mother). These were bearable and accepted norms of grieving. Without a body and without a place to go and call their loved one’s home. How does one tangi?

Marae with no bodies to tangi. Just korowai and photographs. Looking down the dusty coast road hoping these healthy, vibrant, smiling men would return, who had not that long ago travelled to Gisborne and beyond, would never return in body and sadly in belief systems so intense, neither in spirit.

Even still the songs were sung, “Haere ra, Haere! Haere! Haere! the final farewell, echoed by earth and sky a roar of pride, before the slow descending of the sun”.ⁱ

We will remember them.

Peace and love to you and yours

Colin

PS. the photo to the right is Afghanistan 2007 ANAZ Day. Flying are the flags of NZ, Afghanistan, USA and Turkey. Representatives from all these countries were present for commemorations.

ⁱ adapted from Tangi – Witi Ihimaera

