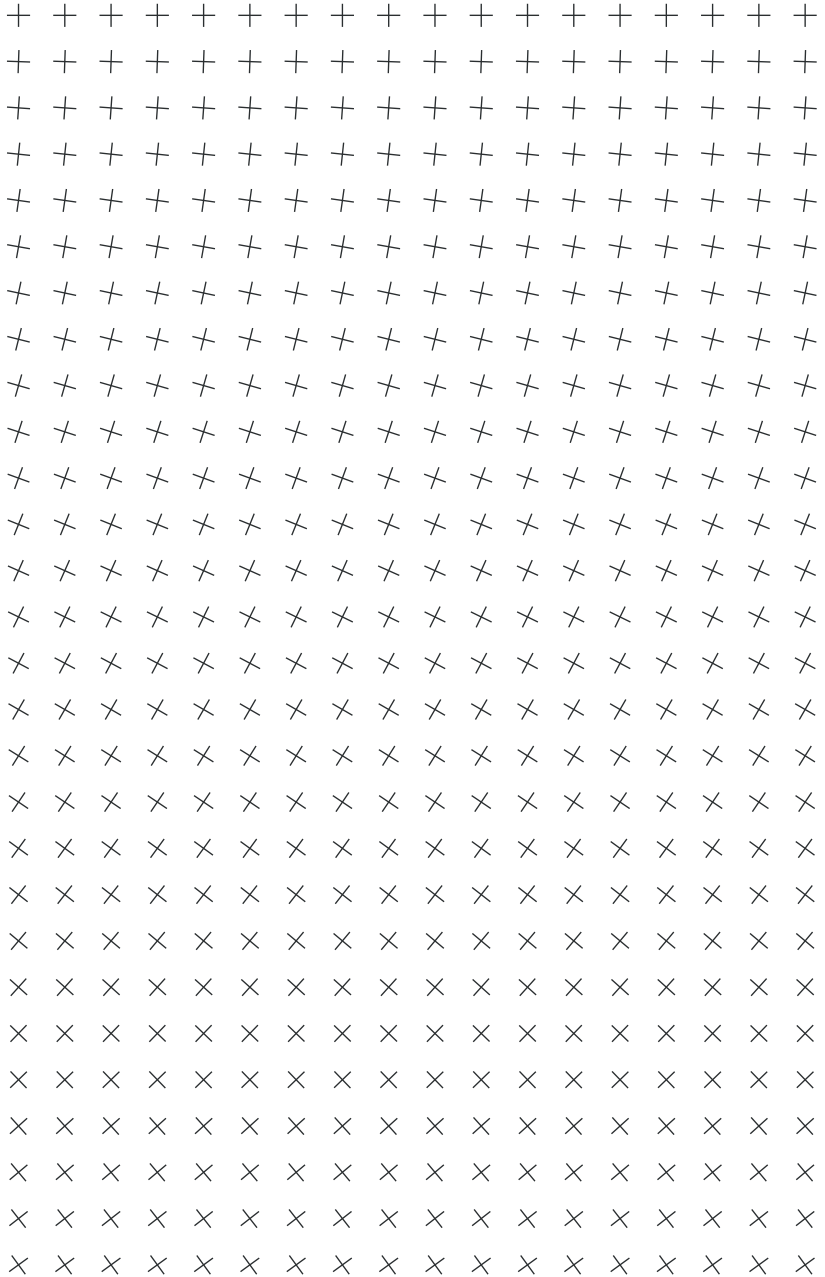


REBUILDING THE RUINS

SEASON OF LENT | 2021



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WELCOME TO THIS YEAR'S LENT STUDIES

Jesus' life, death and resurrection powerfully demonstrate that the world can be changed. The chaotic destruction of self-interest and sin does not have to be the story of human society. The wonderful possibility for life to be better is something the ancient prophets in Israel preached passionately – enthusiastically denouncing the tyranny of the unjust and inspirationally casting a vision for a Godly way of life. Our human destiny is not to live in ruins but for the ruins to be rebuilt and for us to partner with God in this rebuilding. Because of Jesus, God's Anointed One, to which the prophets pointed, light and love, justice and peace can rule where lives respond to God's good news. Jesus is a worker of change in everyday lives. In Jesus, God was present in human flesh and those who follow him today are called into his building trade!

These 2021 Lenten Studies look squarely at the world we live in – a world in which injustice remains a feature, with unequal access to decent housing, the

need to embrace humanity across racial divides, stemming if not reversing creation's desecration and rebuilding God's church to reflect God's character. The unflinching look at the world of "ruins" in which we live is through the lens of the Old Testament prophets. The hope for "rebuilding the ruins" is grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through reading, prayer, study, reflection and discussion, groups using these studies will be rightly provoked because God always wants us to participate in rebuilding. Observing from the sidelines is not an option for Christians! Merely "interpreting" the world around us through reading Scripture is insufficient. The point of Bible studies is to change the world.

- Bishop Peter Carrell, *Bishop of Christchurch*
- Bishop Eleanor Sanderson, *Assistant Bishop of Wellington*

INTRODUCTION

REBUILDING THE RUINS

We've chosen this Lent to base our studies around the writings of the Prophets.

The period they spoke and wrote in was full of uncertainty, chaos and upheaval. It spanned more than two centuries. Politically, Israel was regularly threatened by a succession of empires, eager to conquer and assimilate. It was also riddled by internal strife, which had led to it separating into two kingdoms after Solomon's reign – Israel to the north and Judah to the south.

However, the truth is that Israel had been coming apart at the seams for a long time. Apart from brief exceptions, God's people had repeatedly

failed to live up to their covenantal responsibility to be a light to the other nations. Idolatry of all kinds abounded. In the generations after King David, more and more land was concentrated into the hands of the few. The gap between rich and poor increased accordingly, and the powerful abused their position and status to the detriment of the majority, who were left to scratch out a living under the weight of oppressive practices and high taxes.

Clearly, this was not how God intended his covenant community to live. So Yahweh sent his prophets – people like Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah. All attacked injustice in

uncompromising words. Some went to extreme lengths to communicate Yahweh's anger.

An important emphasis they made was that our relationship with God has significant social and economic implications. If we say we love God, this should be reflected in the way we treat others. Conversely, if we engage in acts of injustice and exploitation, our behaviour reflects a poor relationship with God, and our piety is worthless.

Yet, in spite of the repeated warnings, the leaders and people of wealth and influence refused to change their ways.

In 587BCE, a catastrophe of epic proportions struck the Jewish people. Jerusalem was sacked by the invading Babylonian army. The majestic temple, built by Solomon, was destroyed. The king and all those considered leaders and people of influence and skill were carted off to "exile" in Babylon.

The Exile was a major crisis for the Jews. The level of grief for what they had lost was immense. No wonder they cried out, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept as we thought of Jerusalem." Their broken hearts were not just pining for their homes and land. They were thrown into disarray because they no longer knew how to be God's people in such an alien environment. Somewhat ironically, they felt abandoned by their God. They were deeply disoriented. When asked by their captors to sing songs, they replied, "But how can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a pagan land?" (Ps 137).

After several decades a new empire overwhelmed Judah's captors. The Persians swept in to take control. And as a result, some Jews were allowed to return to their homeland. This happened in several waves. What they returned to was devastating. Jerusalem and

its surrounds were in ruins – physically, economically, socially, and spiritually.

So where was God in all of this? The pivotal event of the Exile was really God’s judgement on an unfaithful people – and the inevitable consequence of failing to keep the Covenant. While their conquest and enslavement at the hands of the Babylonians and Persians was a political defeat, these invading armies were viewed by the Prophets as God’s agents.

However, judgement is never the last word of the Prophets. There is also the promise of deliverance and hope threaded through their messages. And the images they employ are able to fuel our imaginations as much as they did for the people who first heard them.

One metaphor used by several of the Prophets is the invitation and promise to “rebuild the ruins”. While much of this

speaks to the rebuilding and restoration of Jerusalem and Judah post-exile, it is also infused with the complete restoration God will ultimately bring to the whole earth.

So how might this connect with us and our world, two and a half millennia later?

We are fortunate in New Zealand that we do not live in a country that is under threat of invasion, famine, or civil war. Nevertheless, the shifts that have taken place during COVID-19 do not give us any reason to think that our political, economic, and social structures are any less vulnerable. Furthermore, the deep inequalities that have been growing in New Zealand for the last four decades have become even more apparent as the effects of COVID-19 are disproportionately felt by the poor and marginalised.

The threat of the virus has highlighted the “ruins” –

the cracks that run through the lives of those in our communities, churches and nation. As God's people in Aotearoa-NZ, we are invited to partner with God in rebuilding these ruins.

We want to explore four aspects of life where things are in disarray, far from what they once were and far from God's intention – housing for all, bicultural partnership, creation care, and the state of the Church.

So the core question we hope to grapple with through these studies is: "What might it mean to work with and for justice for our bi-cultural partners, for the environment, and for those struggling to find affordable, secure, dry and warm housing? What might working with each other and God to rebuild the ruins, look like?"

Come and join us in this exploration, as we seek to

listen and learn through the Prophets, what God might be saying to us and how God might be stirring us to action this Lenten season.

Grace and peace

– Wayne Kirkland

THANK YOU TO

Cassandra Burton-Wood

for her assistance in the early development of these studies.

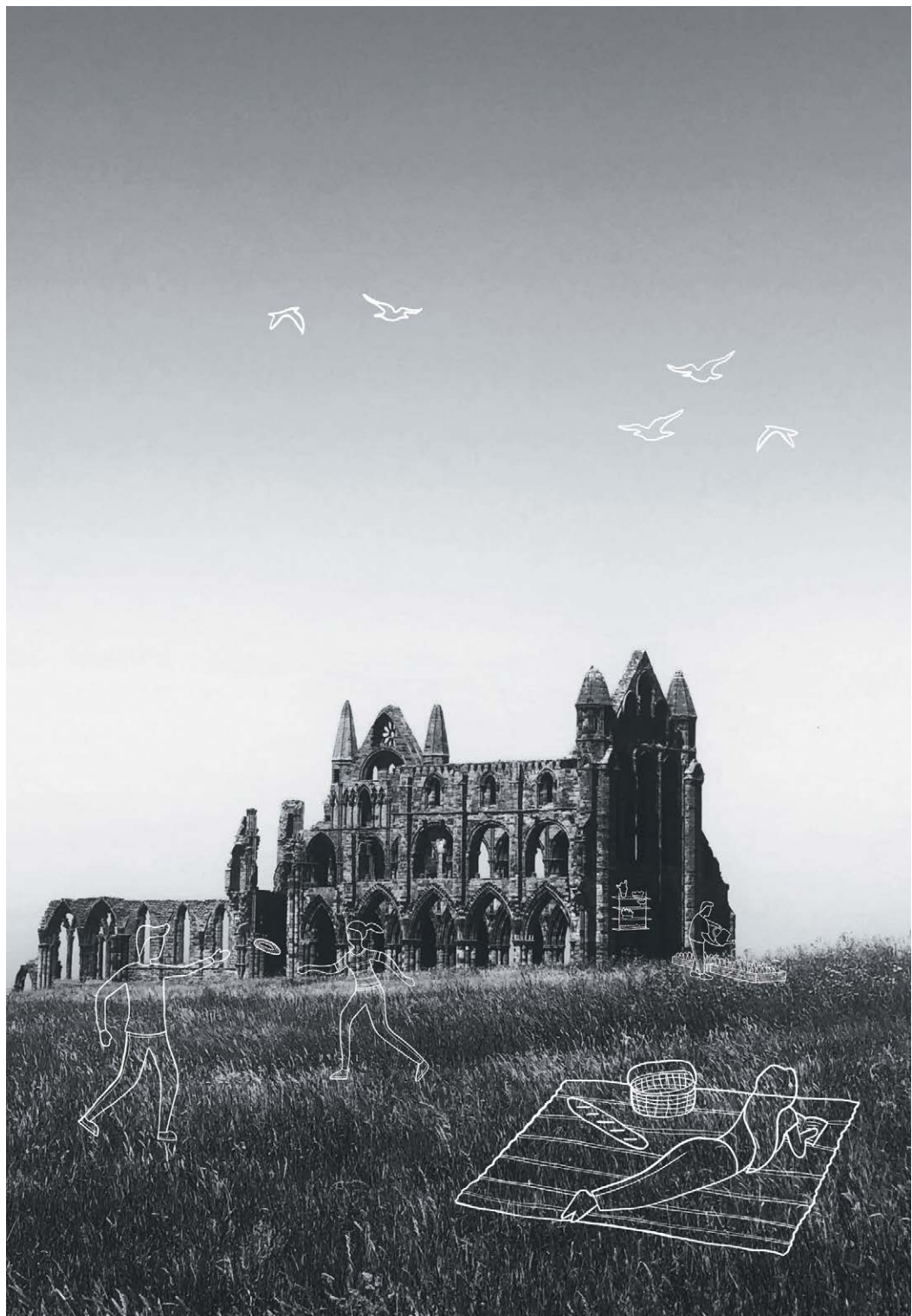
Jay Ruka for his helpful feedback on "Bicultural Ruins".

Hannah O'Donovan for her design expertise.

A BRIEF NOTE ABOUT HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL

These studies have a reasonably uniform structure. We begin each week with an opening story, followed by reading and reflection of a passage or two from the Prophets. The final section of each study is focussed on applying things to our own context. Each session has more questions than you will likely be able to engage with in the time available (75-90 min suggested). Our suggestion is that the facilitator pre-select the questions they think will most engage your group. As a rough guide, 15 minutes (max) is recommended for reading and sharing about the opening story, 40-45 minutes for the biblical section, and about 20-25 minutes for the final section.

These studies are an invitation to go deeper with others. As you plan your Lent groups, we strongly encourage you to pray into who you will invite to learn and grow alongside you this season. We also encourage you to share hospitality with one another, and finally, to join in with your local Chrism service together in Holy Week to finish your journey together.



ANCIENT RUINS

Bishop Ellie writes:

Although I grew up in Derbyshire, I was born in Whitby on the North Yorkshire coast. I feel a deep connection to its many layers of stories. I even wear it around my neck in my Bishop's pectoral cross, which contains Whitby jet, the dark black gemstone that the town is famous for.

Standing high on the headland above the town are the ruins of the Abbey – in its medieval

incarnation of a great building of worship in the Benedictine tradition. It was destroyed in 1540 under Henry VIII, like so many monastic foundations, as our own Protestant tradition took root. The ruins were then ravaged for centuries by erosion and icy wind off the North Sea, and hit by German naval strikes during World War I.

When I was a girl visiting Whitby on family holidays, we would make that iconic walk from the harbour town up the 199 steps to the Abbey,

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to look around the ruins and take in the glorious view. My family was not religious, but that walk was part of our tradition. It wasn't a pilgrimage to a religious place. But for me, even then, I felt my family's disconnect from God and my own longing for deeper relationship.

The Christian whakapapa of the site is traced back to the influential Anglo-Saxon double monastery (for both monks and nuns together), run by its Abbess, Hilda (c.614-680AD). It was part of a network of monasteries including the now more famous Lindisfarne, which grew across the kingdom of Northumbria and beyond as the gospel embedded in the British Isles and spread into Europe.

Hilda was Northumbrian royalty, born into a deeply

divided, tribal warrior society, which was slowly hearing the gospel through both missionaries sent from Rome, and from Celtic missionaries from Ireland. Baptised by the Roman missionary Bishop, Paulinus, in a mass baptism with other members of the royal family, Hilda became attracted to the monastic way of life.

She came to be influenced by the Irish monk, Aidan, who founded the Lindisfarne monastery. Aidan's Celtic tradition, with its emphasis on humility, poverty, creation, and living skin to skin with the suffering, contrasted with the Roman tradition which valued beautiful buildings of worship, structure, and obedience to church doctrine. Aidan's monks would give away any money immediately, sometimes

ANCIENT RUINS

using this to buy the release of slaves. In any place they would go, even if on retreat, they would seek out the person most in need to come alongside to care for. This was the tradition into which the royal Hilda chose to step.

Hilda's abbey would have consisted of 40-50 cells; timber with stone foundations. Women and men's cells were separated, but they shared a chapel for daily rhythms of prayer and worship. There was a school, and a scriptorium for producing books. They shared a common refectory for meals, with a great fire in the centre of the room. Further accommodation for those working the land in a plethora of trades surrounded the monastery. Talents and vocations were recognised and drawn out

from whoever God called. The cowherd Caedmon, with a gift of sharing the stories of God through poetry and song, joined the monastery at Hilda's invitation. However, he was a lay brother – so that he would not be required to undertake Latin and theological studies but could continue to compose the songs which spoke the good news of Christ to ordinary people who would never read but whose oral tradition had taught them to memorise thousands of lines of poetry.

Hilda's monastery became known as a place of excellence in learning, yet it looked very, very humble. There were no posh dwellings, yet it was frequently visited by royalty and the religious movers and shakers of the day, as well as the poor and needy.

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Most of what we know about Hilda comes from her near contemporary, the monk Bede, who noted that they followed the example of the early Church in Jerusalem, with no one either rich or in need, as all things were held in common.

Hilda was able to hold diversity in unity, without compromising what she believed and yet doing so in such a way that people from all walks of life and spectrums of belief called her ‘mother’. Such was the level of respect she was held in that she was asked in 664 to host a Synod which would settle an ongoing conflict between the Celtic and Roman traditions about the dating of Easter – something that was causing huge division in the church. Although she made her position clear, she retained the respect of those

on both sides of the argument, even when her own viewpoint did not win on the day.

Every place, every story has its light and its dark. By the 9th century, Viking raids had all but destroyed Hilda’s monastery. It would not be until after the Norman invasion of 1066 that the site was re-invigorated by Benedictine monks. The Benedictine tradition had beautiful origins, but became synonymous with exploitative wealth and male-dominated leadership. In the 19th century Whitby became famous again as the setting for Bram Stoker’s vampire novel *Dracula*, and today the town is filled with occult shops or sanitised vampire merchandise.

At face value you see little of Hilda’s story as you walk around today. There’s little

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remaining to speak of the vibrant life and mission that existed on this site for hundreds of years. But that's the thing about ruins. They can easily lead us to miss what they once contained. Sadly, Hilda's remarkable leadership in building such a dynamic community is lost to most of Whitby's visitors. And yet, for those who have ears to hear, the weathered stones of the Abbey are filled with stories of faithful followers of Jesus and the impact they had on their generations.

One final thing from Hilda - in her tradition, before any new site was created those involved would pray and fast for 40 days before they even put one stone on top of another. I have adopted this practice in our Diocese when any parish leader begins a new role – holding

them in prayer and fasting for 40 days as they seek to submit themselves to God's will for them in that place – for them to be able to see what is around them with God's eyes, including that which cannot be seen and that which shouts the loudest. What are the stories from our ruins that we need to learn, re-claim and re-tell about how God has worked in our land?

REFLECT

- 01 What impacted you most from Bishop Ellie's story – and that of Hilda's life?
- 02 Have you visited any significant sites of physical ruins? How did you react? What were the feelings you experienced?

ANCIENT RUINS

We've chosen to base these Lenten studies around the theme of “rebuilding the ruins”. Ruins speak of past vitality and life. They carry with them the echoes of past hopes and dreams. That's why they're such a powerful metaphor for thinking about the social, economic, psychological, and spiritual ruins of our lives. There is so much in our society, neighbourhoods, churches, and us in disrepair and decay, far from our hopes or God's intentions. The truth is that God can rebuild something beautiful and vibrant, from the very same rubble of our lives.

ACTIVITY

Briefly, speak out any “metaphorical ruins” you can identify in your own life, neighbourhood, church, or nation, in need of repair.

READING FROM THE PROPHETS

Read aloud Isaiah 58:1-12

Background: Isaiah is a book spoken and written over a period of two centuries. Only the first 39 chapters are thought to be authored by the prophet Isaiah. He lived in the eighth century BCE, during the time the Assyrian Empire was threatening Judah. Chapter 58 is written many, many years later and is part of “Third Isaiah”, authored by one or more “disciples” of Isaiah, during the years after the people have returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon.

QUESTIONS

- 01 What most impacted you when you heard these words? Why?
- 02 In spite of the trauma of many years of exile, followed by trying to rebuild back home, it appears they (particularly the leaders and those with power and wealth) have learnt little. What are they specifically accused of? (What are the ruins in their society?)
- 03 Why is their fasting ineffective in gaining God's attention and help?
- 04 In this passage, fasting from food is turned around and used metaphorically (i.e. "This is the kind of fast I want...") Read through verses 3-10 and mark out all the words/practices that GOD is exhorting the people to "fast" from. It may be helpful to speak them out.
- 05 How do you think powerful people heard these words from the prophet? What about those who had little?
- 06 This prophecy is a hard word. However, it also contains several extraordinary promises. Which ones stirred you? (Read it again if you need to.)
- 07 In verse 12 it says, "You will be known as a rebuilders of walls". What purpose did city walls play in contributing to the wellbeing of ancient cities like Jerusalem? What might this metaphor communicate to those who heard this?
- 08 This message speaks a lot about fasting. During Lent it is common to fast. If you can, share a time when you fasted and it enhanced your receptivity to hearing from God.

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Even though Isaiah 58 is written a century or more after the prophet Isaiah had initially challenged Judah about their idolatry and injustice, and warned them of God's impending judgement, it appears that the leaders and people of wealth were back to their old habits. The role of greed looms large in the sin of Jerusalem. When harvests were bad (i.e. during economic downturns) the powerful treated this as an opportunity to take advantage of those who were struggling - indebting them further. Though they were apparently very committed in their religious devotion, they were blind to matters of justice. Their fasting was accompanied by self-indulgence - a kind of "do-as-you-please" approach. This suggests that those who were powerful had

compartmentalized their faith – being genuinely devout in their public worship, but failing to let it affect their everyday life. The prophet's challenge was to live generously towards those who were struggling economically and not just accumulate more for themselves.

TAKE 2 !

Now read the chapter aloud again, this time from The Message:

“Shout! A full-throated shout! Hold nothing back - a trumpet-blast shout!

Tell my people what's wrong with their lives, face my family Jacob with their sins!

They're busy, busy, busy at worship, and love studying all about me.

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To all appearances they're a nation of right-living people – law-abiding, God-honouring.

They ask me, 'What's the right thing to do?' and love having me on their side.

But they also complain, 'Why do we fast and you don't look our way? Why do we humble ourselves and you don't even notice?'

"Well, here's why: The bottom line on your 'fast days' is profit. You drive your employees much too hard. You fast, but at the same time you bicker and fight.

You fast, but you swing a mean fist.

"The kind of fasting you do won't get your prayers off the ground. Do you think this is the kind of fast day I'm after: a day to show off humility?

To put on a pious long face and parade around solemnly in black? Do you call that fasting, a fast day that I, GOD, would like?

"This is the kind of fast day I'm after: to break the chains of injustice, get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts.

What I'm interested in seeing you do is: sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families. Do this and the lights will turn on, and your lives will turn around at once. Your righteousness will pave your way. The GOD of glory will secure your passage. Then when you pray, GOD will answer. You'll call out for help and I'll say, 'Here I am.'

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“If you get rid of unfair practices, quit blaming victims, quit gossiping about other people’s sins, If you are generous with the hungry and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out, your lives will begin to glow in the darkness, your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight. I will always show you where to go.

I’ll give you a full life in the emptiest of places – firm muscles, strong bones.

You’ll be like a well-watered garden, a gurgling spring that never runs dry.

You’ll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew, rebuild the foundations from out of your past. You’ll be known as those who can fix anything, restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate, make the community liveable again.”

QUESTIONS

- 01 In what ways might these words be particularly pertinent to our own current situation here in Aotearoa-NZ? What particular issues of injustice are you particularly concerned about? What restoration do you long for?
- 02 It's part of our human nature to more easily see sin in other people than ourselves. This is true for us as individuals, churches, cultures, and nations. However, none of us are immune from perpetuating injustice. Take some time in silent reflection, to allow God to bring to mind your own context - relationships, neighbourhood, church, workplace. Where might either your or other people's actions, inaction, or attitudes be oppressing others or allowing injustice to be perpetuated? (You may like to write down what you are recalling.)
- 03 If you were to take a title like "repairer of broken walls" and adapt it for your own work, home, or community context, what would it be/might be involved?

PRAYER

*As you finish, you may like
to read this poem by Walter
Bruggeman as a prayer:*

Exile

Like the ancients, we know
about ashes,
and smouldering ruins,
and collapse of dreams,
and loss of treasure,
and failed faith,
and dislocation,
and anxiety and anger,
and self-pity.
For we have watched the
certitudes and
entitlements
of our world evaporate.

Like the ancients, we are a
mix of perpetrators,
knowing that we have brought
this on
ourselves, and a
mix of victims,
assaulted by others
who rage against us.

Like the ancients, we weep in
honesty
at a world lost
and the dread silence of your
absence.

We know and keep busy in
denial,
but we know.

Like the ancients, we refuse the
ashes,
and watch for newness.
Like them, we ask,
“Can these bones live?”

Like the ancients, we ask,
“Is the hand of the Lord
shortened, that the Lord
cannot save?”

Like the ancients, we ask,
“Will you at this time restore
what was?”

And then we wait:
We wait through the crackling
of fire,
and the smash of buildings,

PRAYER

and the mounting body count,
and the failed fabric of
medicine and justice and
education.

We wait in a land of
strangeness,
but there we sing, songs of

sadness,
songs of absence,
belatedly songs of praise,
acts of hope,
gestures of Easter,
gifts you have yet to give.

THIS WEEK

To become the repairers of broken walls and restorers of street dwellings we first need to learn to pay attention to what has been laid to waste. At some point in the next week, take an hour and prayerfully walk about your neighbourhood, home, or workplace, perhaps with your camera. Ask God to help you to see where the ruins are (and if you would like, take photos that demonstrate or represent those ruins). Some physical ruins may be obvious but try to reflect on the unseen ruins too—the relational ruins, the spiritual ruins.



HOUSING RUINS

Share any photos and/or reflections you had from prayerfully walking your neighbourhood or workplace in the past week.

THE NAENAE EXPERIENCE

In 2012 my wife Jill and I moved back to Naenae, in the Hutt Valley. We were part of a small team involved in helping men reintegrate from prison. Along with our friends (who were prison chaplains) we managed to buy some land off Housing NZ that was

suitable for building two large houses as a base for supporting men after release. Somewhat serendipitously, the land was immediately behind the local Anglican church, St David's, which was struggling to remain viable. Soon after we (the team) were asked to help replant the church as a missional venture.

It wasn't long before we realised that there were limited housing options for the men we were supporting. Few landlords were prepared to rent to them. However, we saw the potential

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to build on a corner section of the church land that was undeveloped. So in late 2014/early 2015 we built two units.

As the housing crisis began to kick in through 2015 and 2016, we found increasing numbers of people in our neighbourhood who were either living in substandard housing – or who could no longer afford to rent in Naenae. We even found several people sleeping rough around our facilities.

Part of this chronic shortage of housing was due to the fact that Housing NZ had demolished blocks of housing directly opposite and around the corner from St David's. But nothing was happening to the land.

During a prayer time in a service in early 2017 we felt challenged as a church to do

something. So we organized a three-day live-in protest on the empty land across the road from the church. Around 40-50 of us camped out, sharing meals with neighbours and passers-by, singing, praying, as well as waving banners and signs explaining what our protest was about – “Land is for living on”, “Naenae needs more housing”.

We had no idea the tidal wave of response our three days would bring. Media and politicians turned up, as well as other interested people from all over Wellington and beyond, to support us in our protest.

Within hours of setting up camp, Housing NZ managers came to meet with us. I think they realized that if they ordered us off their land it would create even more negative publicity for them.

HOUSING RUINS

We challenged them to get moving, as the vacant land had been empty of tenants for over four years.

Our camping on the land was more than just a protest. It was also an act of solidarity with those who were suffering the most from the growing crisis.

On the Sunday we held our service on site, followed by a march around the neighbourhood, praying for the empty blocks of land and the people who had been dislocated, as well as the potential for this land to once again be filled with homes and people. Around a hundred people joined us.

The week after, one of our church members said it was the best – and cheapest – church camp we'd ever had! And we only had to travel over the road.

But as so often happens, when we seek to respond in obedience to what God is asking of us, one thing leads to another.

We found ourselves asking God whether there were other things he wanted us to do in regard to the housing issue. We didn't have to wait long for two new opportunities to come to us.

Firstly, we began hearing stories of families who had lived in Naenae for many years, who were soon to be displaced, because their landlords were selling up, to take advantage of the fast escalating house prices. In two situations various church members were able to respond by buying properties in order to keep families in their houses.

Then we discovered that the church property next to St

HOUSING RUINS

David's was being put up for sale. It was owned by a congregation that had closed some time ago.

We immediately saw the potential to build some more housing. We felt that Naenae didn't need any more church buildings, but it certainly needed more houses. After establishing an independent charitable trust, we were able to buy the property, demolishing the existing building, and then building five 1 and 2 bedroom units. Our intention was to provide secure, warm, low cost rental accommodation, in a supportive environment.

In late May 2019 we opened and blessed these units and the first five tenants moved in. One had been couch-surfing, another was living in a motel (emergency accommodation). The others were also living

in less-than-ideal situations. The difference warm, secure and affordable housing has made for all these folk has been incredible.

Meanwhile, Housing NZ (now called Kainga Ora) had been busy developing the two blocks of land we camped and protested on. By their own admission, our protest had helped stir them to action. They reached out to us with an invitation to help welcome their new tenants into the neighbourhood and actively offer support and care. In partnership with Kainga Ora, we were able to deliver Welcome Packs to the many new tenants/families, as well as begin to build connections with some of these people. Plus, we were able to see several of our own friends from the neighbourhood

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who were living in less-than-ideal situations, be offered a new home.

We've come so far since the decision to build two units on our church land. Never would we have guessed where that first act of obedience might take us, nor how our small efforts might have been used to help "rebuild the ruins" - both physically and metaphorically - in our own neighbourhood. However, we're also aware that while we have been privileged to be involved in some "rebuilding of the ruins", the housing situation has continued to worsen. And so we ask ourselves, "What might God be inviting us to participate in next? Where is there more rebuilding to do?"

REFLECT

- 01 Share your reaction to this story.
- 02 If you can, briefly share an observation or story that illustrates how housing has become such a major issue in Aotearoa-NZ.

READING FROM THE PROPHETS

Observing the Ruins: Jeremiah 22:13-17 & Isaiah 5:8

"And the LORD says, 'What sorrow awaits Jehoiakim, who builds his palace with forced labour. He builds injustice into its walls, for he makes his neighbours work for nothing. He does not pay them for their labour. He says, 'I will build a magnificent palace with huge rooms and many windows.

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I will panel it throughout with fragrant cedar and paint it a lovely red.’ But a beautiful cedar palace does not make a great king! Your father Josiah, also had plenty to drink and eat. But he was just in all his dealings. That is why God blessed him. He gave justice and help to the poor and needy, and everything went well for him. Isn’t that what it means to know me?” say the LORD. “But you! You have eyes only for greed and dishonesty! You murder the innocent, oppress the poor, and reign ruthlessly!” (Jer 22:13-17 NLT)

“Doom to you who buy up all the houses and grab all the land for yourselves— Evicting the old owners, posting no trespassing signs, Taking over the country, leaving everyone homeless and landless.

I overheard God-of-the-Angel-Armies say: “Those mighty houses will end up empty. Those extravagant estates will be deserted. A ten-acre vineyard will produce a pint of wine, a fifty-pound sack of seed, a quart of grain.” (Isaiah 5:8 The Message).

BACKGROUND

Jeremiah’s life straddled the period of the last few years the Jews (Judah) were living in their land and their subsequent conquest and deportation into exile in Babylon. His words in this prophecy are addressed to the king, who “... did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, (and)... filled Jerusalem with blood” (1 Kings 23:37 & 24:4).

Over a century earlier, Isaiah was already warning the people of where their idolatry would

HOUSING RUINS

take them. While they were spared in the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians in 701BCE, eventually God's judgement fell through the Babylonians.

A lot of the injustice of pre-exilic Judah concerned economic issues. Like the

other prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah essentially state that our worship must walk hand-in-hand with our lifestyle – that the way we treat our money and possessions, such as houses, cannot be separated from the way we relate to God.

QUESTIONS

- 01 Share your first reaction to these words from Jeremiah and Isaiah.
- 02 What relevance do you think the prophets' words might have for our context here in Aotearoa – particularly as it relates to housing?
- 03 If a prophet like Jeremiah or Isaiah was speaking for God about our housing crisis, what kinds of things do you think he or she might say? Why?
- 04 Can you think of some policies or practices in NZ that have aggravated the housing crisis?

HOUSING RUINS

A VISION OF REBUILT RUINS

Isaiah 65:17-25

In what is often known as Third Isaiah (chapters 56-66) we have a beautiful description of God's ultimate purposes to rebuild the ruins and fully establish the new age of God's rule. It states:

“Pay close attention now: I'm creating new heavens and a new earth. All the earlier troubles, chaos, and pain are things of the past, to be forgotten. Look ahead with joy. Anticipate what I'm creating...I'll take joy in Jerusalem, take delight in my people: No more sounds of weeping in the city, no cries of anguish...They'll build houses and move in. They'll plant fields and eat what they grow. No more building a house

that some outsider takes over, No more planting fields that some enemy confiscates. For my people will be as long-lived as trees, my chosen ones will have satisfaction in their work. They won't work and have nothing come of it, they won't have children snatched out from under them. For they themselves are plantings blessed by GOD, with their children and grandchildren likewise GOD-blessed. Before they call out, I'll answer. Before they've finished speaking, I'll have heard. Wolf and lamb will graze the same meadow, lion and ox eat straw from the same trough, but snakes - they'll get a diet of dirt! Neither animal nor human will hurt or kill anywhere on my Holy Mountain,” says GOD. (The Message)

QUESTIONS

- 01 What do you notice most about the imagery this passage uses?
- 02 For the Jews still struggling to re-settle Jerusalem and surrounds, what kind of hope would this message have brought?
- 03 Can you think of another part of the Bible that echoes this vision of God's ultimate purposes?
- 04 In what ways might this passage speak hope and promise into our own nation's housing ruins?
- 05 What do you think a vision of just housing in Aotearoa might look like?

PRAYER

Dear Lord, you call us to prayer this Lent, to seek your face and to know and be responsive to you.

We pray for all New Zealanders who live in sub-standard conditions. We ask that you would be especially close to those who do not have

warm, dry, affordable, or secure housing. We are reminded that you know what it is to have no place to rest your head.

Your heart is broken for those who struggle and you actively pursue justice. So Lord, hear our cry for help. We ask that your Spirit would work in the

PRAYER

hearts and minds of our leaders and all who have influence to bring some change.

And in the midst of these ruins we offer ourselves afresh to you. As your people, we know you have a role for us

to play in relieving people's pain and being agents of your transformation.

And so we say, "Lord, here we are: use us." Amen.

THIS WEEK

Is there any reading or researching you could do to inform you of the housing needs in your neighbourhood?

Who are you in touch with in your neighbourhood who is struggling with finding secure, affordable, warm and suitable housing?



BICULTURAL DREAMS – AND RUINS

The 6th of February, 1840. We all know the significance of that date for our nation. It was a day full of hope and promise. However, not everyone knows the story of how certain Māori chieftains and representatives of the British Crown came to sign Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the role of Christianity in this process. The key part several Jesus-followers played has largely been written out of our history books, or alternatively painted in very negative terms.

The truth is that without the work of Henry Williams and

James Stephen (among others), no treaty would ever have been signed.

Williams and his wife Marianne came to Aotearoa in 1823 as CMS missionaries. Nine years after Marsden had preached te Rongopai (the Good News) for the first time on these shores, Christianity had made little impact among Māori. However, by 1845 a staggering 60% of Māori (64,000) would be attending church services.

What changed in those twenty

BICULTURAL DREAMS

years? A key factor was the approach taken by Henry Williams. He quickly set about learning te reo and the culture. The Williams' were far less captured by a Eurocentric view of Christianity than Marsden, and saw that for the Gospel to genuinely take root in Māori society, it had to be indigenised. This led to an emphasis on developing te reo into a written form through the sharing of literacy, an art form Maori quickly utilised. Consequently, the Bible was translated into Māori. Not surprisingly Williams' approach sparked a wave of indigenous missionary endeavours that caused the Gospel to be spread across Aotearoa, from tribe to tribe.

As Jay Ruka notes (see his book, *Huia Come Home*), "It took many years for the Bible

to be translated but when the stories of Jesus were made available to Māori they had a profound effect." William Williams (brother of Henry) did the translating and fellow missionary, William Colenso printed them. The first full Bible print run of 5000 copies was quickly dispersed. By now most Māori were literate and they desired to read the Bible in their own language. One person even walked 250 miles to lay hold of a Bible!

There was a dramatic change taking place, evident in the demise of practices such as cannibalism and a refocus of utu (reciprocity) through the lens of grace. Whole communities of Māori began following the ways of Christ, resulting in enormous transformation. In fact, the decade between 1835

BICULTURAL DREAMS

and 1845 was a period of thoroughgoing “revival”.

People such as Tāmihana Te Rauparaha (son of the revered chief) and his cousin Mātene, Ngākuku (father of Tārore), and many others, were incredibly effective in going where there were no Pākehā missionaries, as well as facilitating the arrival of people such as Octavius Hadfield in rohe that had no Christian presence.

The Williams’ and their fellow missionaries carried a high regard and respect for Māori, and in turn they were deeply trusted. However, they increasingly felt unsettled about the growing prospect of European involvement and intentions. They could see the ominous clouds building throughout the 1830’s. Fortunately at this time, the

Under-Secretary of the British Colonial Office was Sir James Stephen. Stephen was the son of one of the Clapham Sect, as was his wife Jane. Sir James was passionate about charting a new way of relating to indigenous peoples – one that recognized their rights and looked to develop a mutually beneficial partnership.

As the driving force in the Colonial Office’s policy at the time, he was sometimes referred to derisively as “Mr Over-Secretary Stephen” or “King Stephen”, because of the influence he carried as a senior civil servant.

However, Stephen was far from alone in his influence in shaping government policy. The Cabinet minister in charge of the Colonial Office between 1835 and 1839 was Lord Glenelg, otherwise known as

BICULTURAL DREAMS

Charles Grant – also the son of a Claphamite! And there were others who were also part of the “humanitarian” group that dominated the Office at the time. They were real irritants to the likes of Edward Gibbon Wakefield (The NZ Company), who had big plans for making money out of the colonization of Aotearoa and seemed determined to charge ahead come hell-or-high-water.

The humanitarian group’s fingerprints can be seen all over the brief given to Capt. William Hobson, who penned the Treaty. The document was written and presented as a covenant – a sacred agreement before God. This is how it was understood by both Stephen and Williams, and how it was presented to the chiefs.

Henry Williams, along with his son, used his expert

knowledge of te reo to translate the Treaty. And without his encouragement, Māori would never have signed it. That signifies how much many chiefs such as Hone Heke trusted Williams and his colleagues. Furthermore, it was also the missionaries who took the copies of Te Tiriti around Aotearoa to gain the signatories of the many chiefs who weren’t present at Waitangi.

PART 2

Here’s another date: 5th November, 1881. Does this date ring a bell?

Over forty years had passed since the signing of the Treaty. In the intervening decades Māori had been betrayed, disregarded, overwhelmed and decimated. Vast tracts of their land had been lost – much of it through theft

BICULTURAL DREAMS

and “confiscation”. This dramatically escalated in the NZ Wars of the 1860’s. The dream of a genuine partnership between two peoples was in ruins.

Among the acts of resistance to the dominant Colonial Government was a settlement in coastal Taranaki named Parihaka (the “Village of Peace”). Led by two Te Atiawa prophets – Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi – Parihaka was a non-fortified (open) village that welcomed Māori from all tribes and sought to live according to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. The economically thriving settlement of over 2000 people became a target for the land-hungry government when they instituted an effective passive resistance campaign against

surveyors who were marking out “confiscated” land, in preparation for sale to settlers.

The Colonial Government eventually determined that Te Whiti and Tohu and their people were a threat to “progress”. They sent a small army of soldiers, setting up a cannon on the hill overlooking Parihaka and demanding that the villagers leave the settlement and return to their own iwi. When their “orders” were defied, the “siege” ended with the soldiers entering the village and progressively ransacking and destroying the whare and crops, arresting hundreds of men and taking them off to prison, even sexually assaulting and raping women. All this in the face of remarkable hospitality by the children, women and men of Parihaka, who prophetically

BICULTURAL DREAMS

welcomed their oppressors with food and waiata.

One of the biggest casualties of the land-grab and the resulting wars was the responsiveness of Māori to the Gospel. In the mid to late 1840's the influence of the humanitarians in the Colonial Office began to decline and was replaced by a much less sympathetic view of indigenous rights.

If Stephen and Williams were representative of the dream of a genuine bicultural future for Aotearoa-New Zealand, the arrival of Bishop George Selwyn in 1841 and Governor George Grey in 1845 would prove to be catastrophic for the cause of Māori, and for the vibrant indigenous Christian movement.

Much has been written about Governor Grey. While it is

unfair to brand all his dealings with Māori as destructive, the truth is his leadership deeply corroded the good will and trust existing between Māori and Pākehā at the time of the signing of Te Tiriti.

Selwyn was a more complex character. To be fair, he often advocated for the rights of Māori and opposed some of the more unjust land purchases that led to the NZ Wars. However, he wrongly dismissed Henry Williams from the CMS in 1849, treating him harshly. Even more destructive was his reticence to ordain and empower Māori, and his growing insistence that CMS missionaries focus their efforts on the arriving colonial settlers, rather than on Māori. His Eurocentric theology and practice was at odds with the indigenisation

BICULTURAL DREAMS

approach of the CMS under Williams. Most damning and destructive of all, though, was Selwyn's active support and involvement in the invasion of the Waikato in 1863/4. As chaplain of the British forces, his presence on the frontlines was understandably interpreted as an act of solidarity with the colonists and with the horrors their army inflicted.

There's little doubt that the Church was in many ways complicit in the injustices Māori experienced. While many Pākehā missionaries such as Williams continued to advocate for Māori and plead their case in the face of a great tidal wave of injustice, there were others who, like their leader Selwyn, abdicated their call to stand against injustice and were viewed by Māori as agents of British colonisation.

Tragically, today many Māori still view Christianity as the religion of the oppressive Pākehā. While some of this is understandable, much of it has been the result of a rewriting of history (often by Pākehā historians) that has denigrated Williams and misrepresented his motives. It has also typecast the role of the missionaries as being thoroughly destructive to the cause of Māori and the promise of a genuine bicultural partnership.

QUESTIONS

- 01 How do you feel about what you have read?
- 02 What parts of this story are you familiar with?
- 03 What parts are new to you?

BICULTURAL DREAMS

READING THE PROPHETS

Read Psalm 74.

Background: This Psalm is clearly not part of the Prophets' literature. However, it is written after the Babylonians had sacked Jerusalem and the temple in 587BCE. So it very much fits within the time period and story of the

Prophets. The temple was viewed as the centre of life for ancient Israel. Its loss was much more than the physical ruins of a once-great building. For the Jews it meant their whole way of life and relating to God was gone. In fact, its loss led to a crisis of faith.

QUESTIONS

- 01 This psalm is a lament. What words of anguish most impact you?
- 02 What kind of consequences do you think there were for the Jews as a result of the destruction of their way of life in 587BCE? (Economically, socially, spiritually, psychologically etc.)
- 03 Te Whiti and Tohu were very much students of the Old Testament. Read the psalm again and imagine them reading this psalm while languishing in prison in Te Waipounamu / the South Island. Which lines might they have felt particularly relevant to their own story?
- 04 What parallels might you see between this lament and how Māori may have increasingly felt since the Treaty was signed?
- 05 What kind of “ruins” have there been for Māori as a result of the injustices they have experienced since 1840? (Economically, socially, spiritually, psychologically etc.)

BICULTURAL DREAMS

The Māori worldview regarding our connection to the land is remarkably similar to that of the Jews. Both peoples' identity is intimately tied up with the land. That's one reason why the Exile was such a harrowing experience for Israel. And why the loss of land was equally devastating for Māori. It was not just a matter of losing their economic capacity, though this certainly happened. Being torn from their whenua was like an exile, bringing with it deep grief, disorientation and loss of mana. Their whole way of life was deeply compromised.

READ AMOS 5:21-24

Background: Amos is one of the earliest biblical prophets. He is a little unusual in that his oracles were mainly directed at Israel (the larger, northern kingdom) in the

decades before it was destroyed by the Assyrians and taken into captivity. This happened over a century before the same thing happened to Judah (the southern kingdom).

The book of Amos is typical of the Prophets' message. It makes a no-nonsense challenge to those with the power and the means to oppress others. Amos is really the first of the biblical writers to go public with the truth that our worship walks hand-in-hand with our lifestyle and relationships.

In verse 24 Amos uses parallelism – a poetic device used to emphasise his words by using an equivalent phrase to essentially say the same thing. In this case, his first line talks about justice (*mishpat*) while in the second he uses righteousness (*saddiq*).

BICULTURAL DREAMS

Justice and righteousness are very closely intertwined – so much so that they are almost the same thing.

QUESTIONS

- 01 What is your first reaction to hearing these words? What do they trigger for you?
- 02 Reflect on verse 24, as it might relate to the bicultural story of our land since the Treaty was signed. Imagine God speaking these words to us: “Do you know what I want? I want justice - oceans of it. I want fairness - rivers of it. That’s what I want. That’s all I want.” What specifically do you think God would be asking for?
- 03 What role do you think we as the Church in Aotearoa (and more specifically, as Anglicans) can play in addressing the injustices inflicted on Māori?

Note: In our last session (Week 6) we will look more closely at a response, but this question is a starting point.

PRAYER

The Coventry Litany of Reconciliation

In the Protestant memorial at Dachau Concentration Camp in Germany is the following prayer – written by the Provost of Coventry Cathedral after its building was destroyed by German bombs during the Second World War. You may like to pray it aloud, together.

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.
(Romans 3:23)

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,
Father, forgive.

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own,

Father, forgive.

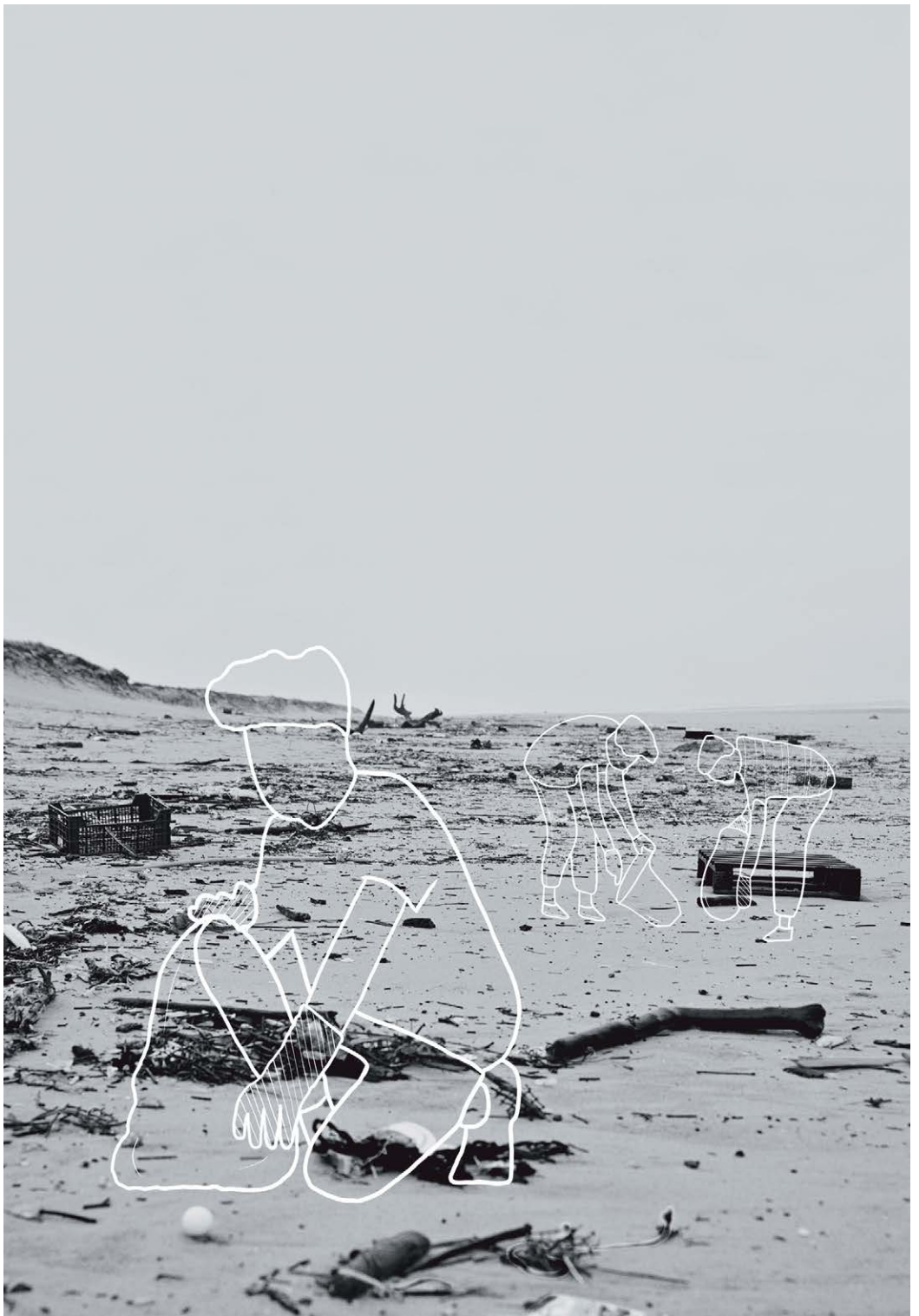
The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth,
Father, forgive.

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,
Father, forgive.

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee,
Father, forgive.

The lust which dishonours the bodies of men, women and children,
Father, forgive.

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God,
Father, forgive.



CREATION RUINS

We live in an extraordinarily beautiful country. In 1988 our family spent a few months living in Te Anau, Fiordland. Each morning we would open our curtains to the sight of the Kepler mountain range. I still remember the exquisite stillness and beauty of Doubtful Sound, a day tramp to Lake Marian (a high altitude lake), seeing takahē for the first time, watching kea pecking away at windscreen rubbers outside the Homer Tunnel, and the spectacle

of one hanging valley after another. However, the drive into Milford Sound was my all-time highlight. It rivals the Canadian Rockies and Swiss Alps in its pure, unadulterated majesty. Rain, sun or snow (and we experienced all three) it offers sights that simply take your breath away.

What an awesome Creator we serve! Sitting on a rock high above the Hollyford Valley, I found it easy to revel in the “temple” that is God’s world and offer praise for

CREATION RUINS

God's amazing handiwork. It felt effortless to feel at peace with the rest of creation, to be inspired in my role as an "image bearer" to care for the Earth.

However, as we all know, that's only half the story. There's an ugly side to our land, our world, indeed to our own role in being responsible for creation.

I find myself in the supermarket and almost everything I touch is covered in plastic – wrappings that have taken fossil fuel to produce, and after my short use will likely spend centuries breaking down in a landfill, already overflowing with the offloads of my excessive consumption. Plastic that will flood our oceans, rivers and lakes, choking birds and fish.

I'm on my smartphone, that brilliant piece of engineering enabling so much of my daily life. The lithium-ion battery is on its way out, offering shorter and shorter life, prompting me to consider ditching it in favour of a new phone that alluringly offers more and better features. Then my three-year-old little marvel, which has consumed significant resources in its making, will be consigned to the garbage. Will it ever decompose?

I hop into my EV, content that I'm doing my bit for the planet by not driving a gas-guzzler. For heaven's sake, I even re-charge this exquisite vehicle with my home solar power system. I feel a touch smug. That is, until I realise my car is powered by a massive battery, made of non-renewable chemicals that may well have

CREATION RUINS

been mined through child labour. And I still don't know whether the battery will be recyclable, let alone the huge mix of metals, plastic, cabling and componentry that have been invested in making the vehicle.

I'm on the building site, managing another project. Feeling rather satisfied with the high insulation I've put in the house, the good use of passive solar, and the rainwater storage tank that will be able to be used for gardening. Then I remember the concrete that went into the foundations and driveway. The mountain of treated timber offcuts sitting to one side, that can't be burned because of its toxicity. A pile of polystyrene and plastic that was carried onsite in the boxes of appliances and plumbing fittings. No one wants this.

It's served its purpose – for a few short days.

I turn on the TV to watch the evening news. The fires are raging in Oz. Experts call it the result of climate change. There's a news report of how the birds are returning to cities and the air and water is clearing because of months of lockdown across the world. That's awesome. Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank Governor is urging us to spend more money so that our COVID-hit businesses survive and our economy doesn't stall and slide into an even deeper recession. Oh the irony: we're asked to love each other by keeping our distance, seeing a taste of liberation and Sabbath for creation as we are forced to slow down, while at the same time being encouraged to spend and consume more

CREATION RUINS

so our economic system survives. Is this what it means to be patriotic?

I'm sitting in the Lazyboy at the hospital, with a drip in my arm. It's my quarterly infusion of a drug that keeps my condition controlled.

I'm grateful for our brilliant medical care and the technology and knowledge behind it. Yet I feel a knot in the pit of my stomach. Needles, bags, and other devices go straight in the bin after they're used. Endless plastic wrappings protecting sterility also get dumped after a single use. I'm one patient and this is one treatment among millions each year in our country. Where does all this used paraphernalia go and what's it doing to the land?

It seems that everywhere I go, every place I inhabit, in

every task I undertake, are unsurmountable obstacles to caring for creation responsibly. Our whole way of life is predicated on over-consumption and convenience. It's like we're caught on an endless, unstoppable treadmill.

I feel so helpless – and hopeless, in the midst of it all. Overwhelmed. Guilty. Exhausted. But what can one person do in the face of such massive ecological challenges? And what can one small country such as ours do, when certain other countries and their leaders, with much bigger footprints, dismiss climate change as a hoax or play “consumption-catchup” on the rest of the world?

CREATION RUINS

QUESTIONS

- 01 Share your reaction to Wayne's story?
- 02 What parts of it do you particularly identify with?

IN THE BEGINNING...

In the Genesis account of creation, this world is presented as God's "temple", and humans as God's "priests", commissioned to not only inhabit the "temple" but also represent God in caring for the temple. The central task God gives all of humanity is to be guardians (kaitiaki) of this good creation/temple. We are commissioned to, "Fill Earth! Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that

moves on the face of Earth" (Gen 1:28 The Message).

Some might say that we've excelled at "filling Earth", misunderstood the "taking charge" part, and done very poorly at "being responsible"!

So it figures then, that God's relationship with us is intimately tied up with our relationship to the land and the rest of creation. In fact, human sin is at the heart of creation ruin.

REFLECT

Brainstorm/list all the aspects where we humans have failed to be responsible kaitiaki (stewards) of creation.

CREATION RUINS

READING FROM THE PROPHETS

Background: Jeremiah lived through the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 587BC, and the early years of the Exile. His language is poetic, full of imagery and metaphor, as he charges the people and their leaders with being unfaithful to God and consistently breaking their covenantal obligations.

Jeremiah is sometimes known as “the weeping prophet”. He could he see what others couldn’t, and he lived to see the consequences of Judah’s unrepentance. Not only did his warnings go unheeded, he was also viewed as a traitor, abused, tried, and even imprisoned.

Read Jeremiah 12:1-4 (NLT)

"LORD, you always give me justice when I bring a case before you. So let me bring you this complaint: Why are the wicked so prosperous? Why are evil people so happy? You have planted them, and they have taken root and prospered. Your name is on their lips, but you are far from their hearts. But as for me, LORD, you know my heart. You see me and test my thoughts. Drag these people away like sheep to be butchered! Set them aside to be slaughtered!

How long must this land mourn? Even the grass in the fields has withered. The wild animals and birds have disappeared because of the evil in the land."

QUESTIONS

- 01 What appears to be behind Jeremiah's accusations and complaints? Who is Jeremiah angry with? Why?
- 02 In what way does Jeremiah feel there is a connection between the unfaithfulness of the people and the state of the land and wildlife?
- 03 When you hear the phrase, "How long must this land mourn?" what does this bring to mind in our context here in Aotearoa-NZ and the world, in 2021?
- 04 In Jeremiah 2:7 the prophet speaks these words, "I brought you to a garden land where you could eat lush fruit. But you barged in and polluted my land, trashed and defiled my dear land." (The Message)
 - What images come to mind when you hear the words, "defiled my land"?
 - For you, what are the most grievous ways we have "defiled the land"?

CREATION RUINS

THE PROMISE OF RESTORATION FOR THE LAND

The Prophets provide many images of God’s ultimate purposes in restoring everything to how it was intended to be – including creation. These beautiful images remind us that God’s intention is not only for people to flourish, but also for the land and every creature to thrive. This is a vision of shalom for the whole of creation. Here are three passages that speak of a miracle of transformation in the land and its inhabitants:

Isaiah 35: 1-2, 6b-7 (NLT)

“Even the wilderness and desert will be glad in those days. The wasteland will rejoice and blossom with spring crocuses. Yes, there will be an abundance of flowers and singing and

joy! The deserts will become as green as the mountains of Lebanon, as lovely as Mount Carmel or the plain of Sharon. There the LORD will display his glory, the splendour of our God... Springs will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams will water the wasteland. The parched ground will become a pool, and springs of water will satisfy the thirsty land. Marsh grass and reeds and rushes will flourish where desert jackals once lived.”

Ezekiel 36:33-36 (NLT):

“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: When I cleanse you from your sins, I will repopulate your cities, and the ruins will be rebuilt. The fields that used to lie empty and desolate in plain view of everyone will again be farmed. And when I bring you back, people will say,

CREATION RUINS

‘This former wasteland is now like the Garden of Eden! The abandoned and ruined cities now have strong walls and are filled with people!’ Then the surrounding nations that survive will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruins and replanted the wasteland. For I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do what I say.”

Isaiah 11:6-9 (The Message)

“The wolf will romp with the lamb, the leopard sleep with the kid. Calf and lion will eat

from the same trough, and a little child will tend them. Cow and bear will graze the same pasture, their calves and cubs grow up together, and the lion eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will crawl over rattlesnake dens, the toddler stick his hand down the hole of a serpent. Neither animal nor human will hurt or kill on my holy mountain. The whole earth will be brimming with knowing God-Alive, a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide.”

QUESTIONS

- 01 Which line, thought, or image from these passages is most striking to you? Why?
- 02 Given the priority the Bible gives to creation care and the way it is an integral aspect of the renewal and restoration, why is it that we often just see this kaitiakitanga as a secondary Christian mandate?
- 03 In what ways does a theology that views the Earth as ultimately being disposable, shape the way we might care for the planet? How does this contrast with a theology that sees the Earth as ultimately being renewed?
- 04 Many indigenous cultures - including Māori - have a much more integrated view of caring for the land and its inhabitants, than Western cultures. Why is this and what can we learn?
- 05 Retaining hope in restoration is not easy when we see the devastation of creation all around us. Are there any practices that can help us to remain hopeful of renewal?
- 06 Where in your neighbourhood/parish can you see the “ruins” or lack of creation care/abuse of the land?
- 07 Are there any signs of hope/initiative you are aware of, emerging in your community or neighbourhood?
- 08 What aspect of creation care are you (personally and as a church) most challenged to attend to? If you have started on this “rebuilding”, share briefly how this has come about, and if you have yet to begin, share what you think might be a good starting point.

Note: In our last session (Week 6) we will look more closely at a response, but this question is a starting point.

PRAYER

Here is a poem by Malcolm
Guite you may like to read
prayerfully as you close your
time together.

In Praise of Decay

So much is deadly in the
shiny new,
Persistent plastic choking out
our life,
The landfill of each ego's
empty stuff,
Where poison and possession
still accrue.
So praise him in the old and
mouldering:
In pale gold leaf-fall losing
shape and edge,
In mottled compost rustling
and rich,
From which the stuff of life is
still unfolding.

Change and decay is what our
plastic needs
To break the bleak persistence
of our wasted.
Pray that we learn the lost arts
of our past,
The arts of letting go and
sowing seeds,
That secrets of the lowly and
the least
Might save us from the
dreadful things that last.

THIS WEEK

Spend some time making a list of all the things in creation for which are you the kaitiaki. Offer them in prayer back to God, and ask how you might better take care of them. Commit to one action you could take every day that will help you to remember...

Some practices to consider:

- Giving thanks before a meal (learn a karakia in te reo?)
- Growing something you can eat
- Reducing waste (often means sacrifice of time)
- Taking part in a community project (e.g. cleaning up rivers/beaches, community garden)
- Silence/lament.



CHURCH RUINS

Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone was a young Italian, born in 1181 to wealthy merchants. He grew up in the small town of Assisi, north of Rome. His early life was unremarkable. Young Francesco (his family changed his name soon after his birth) lived recklessly, squandering both his time and money. These days we might have described him as a spoilt brat.

However, when he was 20 he joined the Assisi militia in a skirmish with the

neighbouring Perugians, and was captured and imprisoned for a year, until his father was able to negotiate a ransom for his release. Incarceration proved to be a turning point for Francesco. He returned home in a much-sobered frame of mind. His early twenties led him in a very different direction – one of prayer and solitude.

By 1205 he had left home to take up life as a hermit, living in a rundown church on the edge of Assisi. It was here that

CHURCH RUINS

he heard Christ speak to him three times, saying, “Francis, go, repair my church, which is falling completely to ruin.” The young man took the words literally and began to repair the walls of the church building. Soon he took to selling off his family’s goods to raise money for repairs, and to give generously to the poor. His enraged father dragged him before the local bishop, asking Francis to renounce all claims to the family wealth. Somewhat dramatically the young man stripped off his clothes and gave them to his father, saying, “Up to now I called you father, but now I can honestly say, ‘Our Father who art in heaven’. I will put my faith in him.” Stark naked, Francis was immediately embraced by the bishop, who, impressed by his zeal, covered him with his own cloak until

servants were able to retrieve an old garment!

Some time later, Francis was reading the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus says to his disciples, “Take no gold or silver or copper in your wallet, no bag for your journey...” This propelled him to leave his hermit life and begin an itinerant existence, living in poverty and wandering through towns and villages preaching the Gospel.

It was not long before the charismatic Francis attracted others who wanted to follow his example. So he developed a simple rule of life, determining he needed to gain approval from Pope Innocent III. Marching to Rome with his ragtag bunch of followers, Francis finally gained an audience with the Pope, who initially was skeptical, saying,

CHURCH RUINS

“My sons, your plan of life seems too hard and rough.” But eventually Innocent gave his approval, perhaps recognizing Francis’ charisma and prophetic edge. Within eight years, the new Order would number 5,000.

Not long after, Francis met a young, wealthy woman from his hometown of Assisi. Clare desired to follow his way of life. So Francis helped her establish the “Second Order” of Franciscans – what we now know as the Poor Clares. The two of them developed a truly remarkable spiritual friendship – filled with not only a deep love and respect for each other, but also hearts united in their passion for Christ and his ways.

Francis lived a highly unconventional life, full of joy, fuelled by an absolute love for

Jesus. To be sure, Francis had his faults. As his organisation mushroomed he struggled to manage the growth. He was a poor administrator and in many ways, ill-suited for leading such a movement, eventually stepping down as its head. In Christian partnership, Clare often provided the leadership support he needed.

There are legendary stories about Francis kissing a leper, preaching to birds (he had a deep love for creation), and receiving the stigmata of Christ on his body. He was a man of peace in a world full of violence. It was a time of deep enmity between Christian and Muslim. In 1219 Francis travelled to the Holy Land, scene of the Fourth Crusade. Here he crossed crusader lines to meet with the Muslim sultan and share the gospel of

CHURCH RUINS

peace. His visit left an indelible imprint on the sultan, who though he didn't convert to Christianity, developed huge admiration for the peace-loving friar.

So what relevance does the life of Francis have to us, given he lived over 800 years ago? While this period made seem a million miles away, there are definitely some parallels with our time. The world of Francis was changing rapidly, bringing increased anxiety to people's lives. However, it was perhaps the state of the Church that echoes most with our own times. As one writer has put it, "...the church was hemorrhaging credibility; it was seen as hypocritical, untrustworthy, and irrelevant. Some people even wondered if it would survive. Clergy were at the centre of all kinds

of sexual scandals. It had commercialized Jesus, selling pardons, ecclesiastical offices, and relics... Popular songs ridiculing the church and clergy could be heard all over Europe. The laity felt used by the professional clergy, as if they were there to serve the institution, not the other way around. The church had also become dangerously entangled in the world of power politics and war." (Ian Cron, *Chasing Francis*). The Church was "in ruins". Sound familiar?

Towards the beginning of his faith journey Francis had heard Christ ask him to repair God's house. While Francis took him literally, in a sense, Francis' whole life was engaged in rebuilding the ruins. He and Clare, along with their fellow brothers and sisters, brought tremendous renewal

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to the Church of their day. Through taking the words of Jesus seriously and seeking to live out the Gospel with faith-filled, joyful and courageous obedience, they challenged the decaying institutional church by their actions and rejection of wealth, power, and violence, modelling another way of following Jesus.

In 2013 an Argentinian cardinal was appointed Pope. He chose the name Francis, saying, “Francis of Assisi brought to Christianity an idea of poverty against the luxury, pride, vanity of the civil and ecclesiastical powers of the time. He changed history.” Indeed, he did.

QUESTIONS

- 01 Share your reaction to Wayne’s story?
- 02 How might the lives and works of Francis and Clare speak to our situation?
- 03 What are ways in which our contemporary church is “in ruins”?

READING FROM THE PROPHETS

Background: It’s the year 520BCE. Eighteen years earlier, many of the Jews exiled to Babylon had been allowed to return to Judah, following the conquering of the mighty Babylonian Empire by the Persian king, Cyrus. Even though they were still ruled by the Persians, the Jewish returnees were granted semi-independence. Zerubbabel (grandson of the exiled king

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Jehoiachin) was governor, and Joshua was the high priest. However, Jerusalem and its temple and walls was still in a great state of ruin and disrepair. In spite of Cyrus ordering eighteen years earlier that the temple be rebuilt (see Ezra) no progress had been made. It's in this context that the prophet (Haggai) was called to speak.

Read Haggai 1

QUESTIONS

- 01 What do you notice in reading this passage?
- 02 Why do you think no progress has been made on rebuilding the temple?

Haggai identifies that the people are preoccupied with themselves and their own survival. They live in uncertain, even perilous, times. The

realities of drought, shortage of supply, and external threats from neighbouring peoples, have left them believing that their future is really in the hands of fate, foreigners, and nature, and not in the hands of God. As a result, they are so consumed with survival they cannot see what God wants to do in and through them.

In Ezra we are told that the old people weep when they remember the magnificence of Solomon's temple that was destroyed nearly seventy years earlier by the Babylonians. They are in grief mode, because what they see being built is never going to be as stunning as the old temple. However, what they miss is that it was always God's magnificent presence that made the temple glorious, not the beauty of the temple itself.

QUESTIONS

- 01 In what ways can we also be overwhelmed by events outside our control (like the pandemic, escalating cost of housing, losing our job, etc.)?
- 02 What are ways we can remind ourselves (individually and collectively) that our future is in God's hands and not the economy and/or the virus?

In Matthew 6, Jesus tells his disciples to "seek first God's kingdom". What might that look like today for your parish and diocese?
- 03
- 04 In what ways can we be tempted to look back and pine for the "glory days" of our church or diocese in past years?
- 05 How might this get in the way of expecting and looking for how God might reveal himself in the present and into the future?
- 06 What signs do you see in your parish and in the wider diocese of new things God is doing?
- 07 Is there anything that we might have to let go of from the past, in order to embrace what God wants to do now?
- 08 If a prophet like Haggai was speaking to you/us, what kinds of things might he or she say? What "action" or change might she or he challenge us to take?
- 09 In the new covenant God's presence and glory is not centred on buildings like our cathedral or parish churches. While they may have a part to play in our being the church, it is actually we ourselves, who are God's temple. So what, in our context, might be involved in "building" together?

PRAYER

Pray for each other.

Finish by saying together the well-known prayer, attributed to Francis. You may want to stand and link arms as you speak:

Lord, make us an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

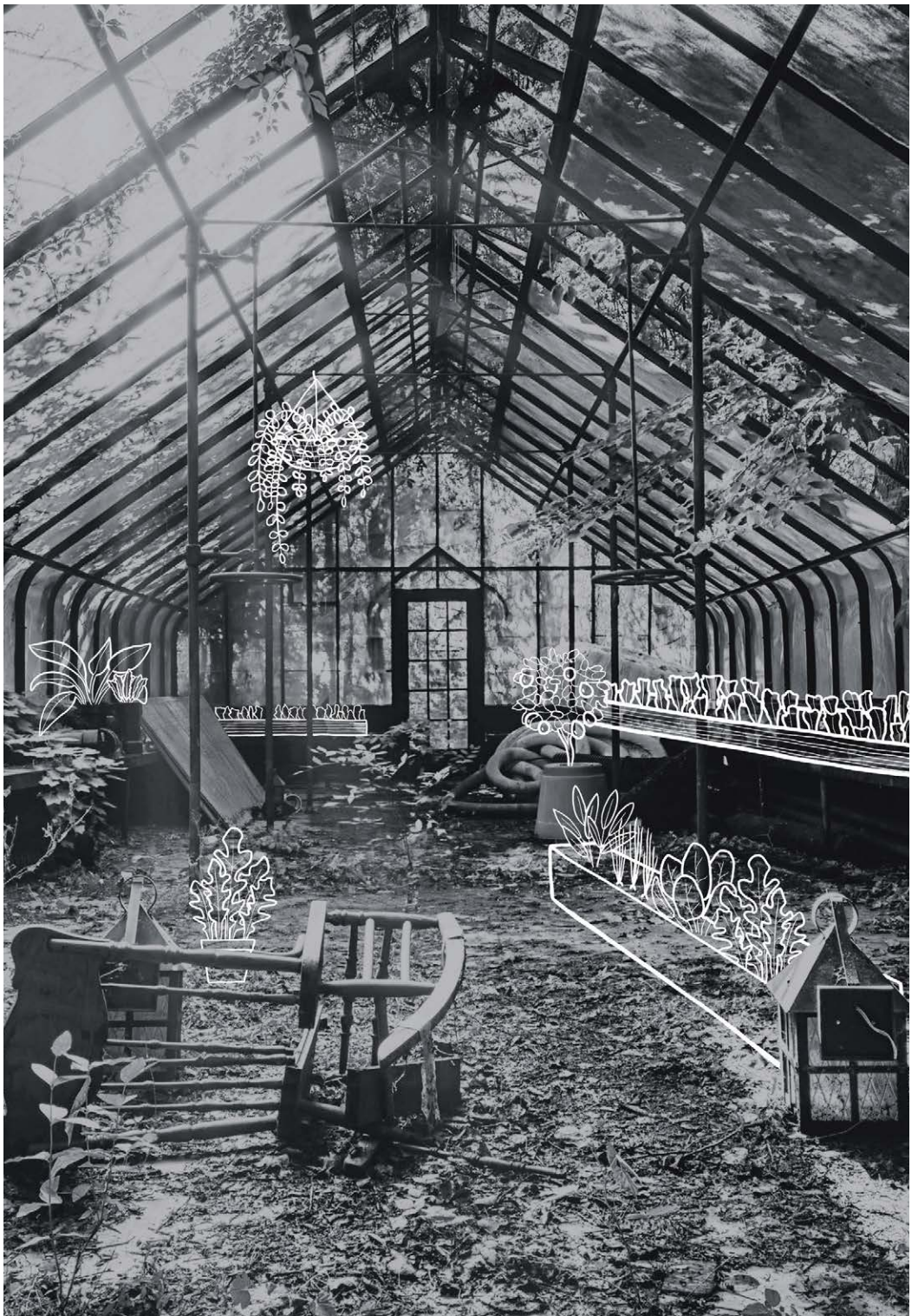
Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that
We may not so much seek to
be consoled, as to console;
Not so much to be understood
as to understand;
Not so much to be loved, as
to love;
For it is in giving that
we receive;
It is in pardoning that we
are pardoned;
It is in dying that we awaken
to eternal life.

Amen.



REBUILDING THE RUINS

REBUILDING JERUSALEM

The first of the exiles returned to Jerusalem in 538BCE. Even so, most people were still living a precarious existence years later. While the temple had been rebuilt around 515BCE (see Ezra 1-6), the city was still devastated and exceptionally open to all kinds of threats, because its walls remained in ruins. This state of affairs continued for several decades.

Back in Babylon, a Jew named Nehemiah, who was

an important public servant (the cupbearer to the Persian king), heard of the plight of those who had already returned. His immediate response was to pray, seeking the Lord for what to do. As a result, Nehemiah approached the king, explaining the desperate state of things in Jerusalem. Apparently King Artaxerxes was moved, because he commissioned Nehemiah to return to his homeland to take charge and ensure the rebuild happened.

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This is how Nehemiah ended up becoming the delegated governor of the city, overseeing the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls. The story of Nehemiah is recorded by the central character himself (known unsurprisingly as the Book of Nehemiah), so there's a certain susceptibility to painting oneself in the best light possible!

Nevertheless, it's an inspiring story of how this entrepreneurial leader, under all manner of pressures, managed to not only empower a demoralized and divided people to speedily rebuild the walls, but also deal with the divisions, conflicts and inequities of the residents. In one sense, the physical rebuilding was a mechanism for helping the people re-imagine what life with God

at the centre of things, could look like.

As a leader, Nehemiah is intensely aware that in order to rebuild the "ruins" of Jewish life, issues of injustice must be confronted. These wider issues of justice come into focus in chapter five, when Nehemiah is approached by a group of Jews who are being oppressed by their own brothers and sisters. These people complain that through exploitation they have lost everything:

"We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain...we are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine...we have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards...Although we are of the same flesh and blood

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as the rest of our people and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others”

We are told that in response Nehemiah got very angry. Then he stopped to ponder what he should do. Finally, he gathered the leaders together and denounced their injustices in public. And he challenged them to give what they had gained back to the people they had exploited – believe it or not, they agreed to do so!

Then Nehemiah arranged a relief programme providing food and money for the people, encouraging others to do the same. However, knowing that this kind of help usually only

provides temporary relief, he also tried to work on longer term solutions. He challenged those Jews who had taken land to give it back. Not only this, but he suggested they also give back olive trees to help these people develop a livelihood again, and to lend out money for expenses at no interest for those who needed assistance to get restarted in business.

Finally, knowing that good intentions alone don't ensure action, Nehemiah asked the leaders to covenant before God and each other that they would be true to their word and act.

So Nehemiah established a comprehensive, long term community development programme. Quite a feat. And all in his 'spare time', because his main 'job' was overseeing a major building project.

REBUILDING THE RUINS

The story of Nehemiah doesn't finish there, however. He saw another challenge – regarding the danger of adopting lifestyles that can only be supported while others live in poverty. As a result, Nehemiah decided to identify with the needs and aspirations of the oppressed rather than the oppressors.

He chose to live in a way that expressed this concern, so that his own lifestyle might echo his ideals and be an example to others. We read about this in the second part of chapter five:

Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. (Verse 14)

But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed

a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. (15)

Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land. (16)

Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. (17)

Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were

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heavy on these people. (18)

Each verse emphasises a different step in Nehemiah's response.

In verse 14 Nehemiah chooses to live more simply than his predecessors. Then he consciously resists being sucked into the cycle of oppression (v15). This is followed by him getting on with the job that will benefit everyone (overseeing the rebuilding of the wall), instead of spending his energies accumulating more wealth for himself (v16).

In verse 17 Nehemiah invites others to come and share what he has – in a significant display of hospitality to not only his fellow Jews, but also foreigners. Finally (v18) Nehemiah chooses not to claim all that he is entitled to. In fact he deliberately forgoes many of

his rights and privileges to help relieve the burden on others.

The story of Nehemiah presents us with quite a challenge. As a high level public servant, he was well rewarded materially. It would have been easy for him to just enjoy the privileges that went with his position. Instead, he made some quite deliberate choices to use his influence and wealth to (as the prophet Micah put it) “act justly and love mercy”. In doing so, he contributed significantly to rebuilding the ruins of Jewish society.

REFLECT

- 01 What impresses you most about Nehemiah?
- 02 What are you most challenged by his approach?

REBUILDING THE RUINS

READING FROM THE PROPHETS

Read Isaiah 61

Background: This prophetic material is likely to have been written sometime after the

temple has been rebuilt, but before Ezra and Nehemiah led the resurgence of Jerusalem. The context is a demoralised and struggling population, living in a still devastated city and surrounds.

QUESTIONS

- 01 If you can, identify what is similar in this passage to that of Isaiah 58, which we read in the first week? What are the differences? *Note: you can reread the passage.*
- 02 What are ways we can remind ourselves (individually and collectively) that our future is in God's hands and not the economy and/or the virus?
- 03 When the prophet mentions "the year of the LORD's favour", what is he referring to in the Jewish law? (see Leviticus 25) What might be the implications of this?
- 04 In what ways does this passage fuel your imagination regarding what God calls us to participate in? To help you answer this, you may like to pick a metaphor or image that the prophet uses to fire the listener's imagination.
- 05 What significance is there in Jesus reading and preaching from this passage in the synagogue of his hometown (see Luke 4)?

REBUILDING THE RUINS

FROM CRUCIFIXION TO RESURRECTION

We have seen that the message of the Prophets does not ultimately lie with God's judgement, but rather with the hope and vision of a renewed earth.

This is mirrored in Holy Week. The crucifixion of Jesus appears to completely dash the hopes and dreams of the disciples, which are in absolute ruins as Jesus hangs on the cross. However, within a couple of days an alternative reality emerges. And with it the hope of full restoration.

This is God's promise. Whatever devastation and ruins we live amongst, this is not the last word. And even more remarkably, God invites us to participate in the rebuilding. This Easter, let's

celebrate the hope of ultimate transformation, and commit ourselves to partnering with God in this wonderful work of new creation.

SHAPING A RESPONSE

In the face of such massive "ruins" it can be easy to lose heart that things will ever change and that our actions can make a tangible difference. However, all we are asked to do is respond in obedience to what we hear the Spirit saying to us.

There are actually countless ways we can respond. As the Naenae story in Week 2 illustrates, these responses will likely include:

- Prayer and Action
- Macro and Micro
- Personal and Communal

REBUILDING THE RUINS

PRAYER AND ACTION

As followers of Jesus we are called to intercede. Remember, it is God who orchestrates the rebuilding and only God who is capable of bringing shalom (or the Kingdom) to fulfilment. However, often God uses us to be the answer (or at least part of the answer) to our prayers. So we must also prayerfully discern what part God wants us to actively play.

MACRO AND MICRO

All of our “ruins” revolve around systemic issues that are driven by politics, policies, principalities and powers. Responding at the macro level is very necessary for long term change. Protest, drawing attention to an issue, advocacy, policy development,

and affirmative action can all play a part in addressing these macro issues.

However, the consequences of these macro issues are felt by countless individuals, families, parishes, and communities. As a result, there is also plenty of room for responding at the micro level. Indeed, change at the personal and local level is imperative. And this starts with us – you and me! We must be changed. If we fail to do this, we end up overwhelmed and feeling as though we have no power to do anything that might change things. We become helpless victims. This is not God’s intention for us.

REBUILDING THE RUINS

PERSONAL AND COMMUNAL

Asking what God might want me to do is an important question. My response will be shaped somewhat by my circumstances, gifts, and motivations.

However, communal responses are also critical. This might involve a home group, a parish, or a whole diocese. Drawing on our collective resources and talents can often make a bigger difference.

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO US?

In the light of this, let's review the four types of "ruins" we have briefly looked at this Lent: housing, bicultural, creation, and church.

Remember, we are not called to do all the rebuilding, just the parts that are within our hands and those we sense the Spirit inviting us to participate in. And we're not called to do everything, but we are called to do something!

REFLECT

- 01 Which of these forms of responses do you most naturally gravitate toward? Why?
- 02 Which of these types of responses most challenges you? Why?

ACTIVITY

Spend some time as a group reflecting on what God might be saying to you. Use the grid (prayer/action, macro/micro, individual/communal) to sketch out a response.

Note: you may like to spend some minutes quietly doing this as individuals first, followed by a good amount of time together sharing thoughts and insights. Remember to look for a starting point/s – you don't need to chart a strategic plan for the next five years!

	PRAYER/ ACTION	MACRO/ MICRO	INDIVIDUAL/ COMMUNAL
HOUSING RUINS			
BICULTURAL RUINS			
CREATION RUINS			
CHURCH RUINS			

PRAYER

1. Read together Malcolm Guite's poem/prayer below, followed by a couple of minutes of silent reflection.

Matthew 11:15: "He that has ears to hear, let him hear."

How hard it is to hear the things I think I know,

To peel aside the thin familiar film
That wraps and seals your secret just below:

An undiscovered good, a hidden realm,

A kingdom of reversal, where the poor

Are rich in blessing and the tragic rich

Still struggle, trapped in trappings at the door

They never opened, Life just out of reach...

Open the door for me and take me there.

Love, take my hand and lead

me like the blind,
Unbandage me, unwrap me from my fear,
Open my eyes, my heart, my soul, my mind.

I struggle with these grave clothes, this dark earth,
But you are calling, 'Lazarus, come forth!'

2. Now finish by praying for each other (individually and collectively), in regard to responding to what God has been saying to you during this series.



We encourage you to give generously to this year's Anglican Missions **2021 Lenten Appeal**. We are hoping to raise around \$14,000 for each of the following projects:

St Luke's Hospital, Nablus, Diocese of Jerusalem. St Luke's is hoping to be able to purchase electrical beds for its maternity ward, providing improved health care for local women.

Province of Alexandria, Diocese of Egypt. The Diocese of Egypt is seeking support to develop youth leadership training.

Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACoM). This project aims to increase rainwater harvesting capacity for ACoM's religious communities, in areas particularly vulnerable to climate change. Funds required for this are NZ\$6,000, so any additional funds raised will support the Christian Care Centre in Honiara, providing short term shelter for vulnerable women and children.

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