

**Sermon for the Opening of GA21  
September 29, 2021  
The Right Reverend Hamish Galloway**

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

<sup>4</sup>Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup>Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup>These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup>Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup>Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup>Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

**Mark 10:13-16**

<sup>13</sup>People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup>When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. <sup>15</sup>Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." <sup>16</sup>And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Te tua tahi  
Me wehe atu  
Ki to tatou Ariki Nui  
A Ihu Karaiti

Haanga e te Atua  
he whakapaparanga  
mo nga wa  
e heke mai nei

Tena Koutou Katoa

No Kotorania oku tupuna  
Ko Keke Huka te mounga  
Ko Opawaho te awa (opawa ho)  
Kei Otautahi toku kainga inaianei (O tau tahi)  
Ko Galloway toku whanau ingoa

Ko Lindsay toku papa  
Ko Betty Law toku mama  
Ko Anne toku hoa rangatira  
Ko Hamish toku ingoa

Nga mihi nui  
kia koutou katoa

No reira, Tena Koutou, Tena Koutou, Tena Tatou, Katoa

First, I want to honour and acknowledge Jesus Christ. And my prayer is for the empowerment of all generations for the time to come.

This is a prayer that is strong in the biblical narrative. Both passages read tonight carry an intergenerational message. One has mothers desperately trying to connect their children with Jesus. The other has a very old man passionately imploring the generations below him to connect the love of God from their hearts to the hearts of the young!

It is a theme that is strong in my heart. The intergenerational connection theme comes for me out of my 21 years as chaplain at St Andrew's College. What a wonderful opportunity our Church Schools offer us to engage around faith with thousands of young people each year. I did that day after day for 20 years. I discovered both a deep sense of spiritual curiosity, but also an increasing disconnection from church! Now as an older man myself, elected Moderator on the cusp of my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, it is a theme that has nonetheless aged well within me! I am driven by a desire to reconnect those the spiritual wonderings of the younger generation with what the Church has to offer!

I want to start tonight by acknowledging the generations who have gone before us and shaped who we are today. I have enjoyed working on my mihi. It has made me think deeply about the generational impact on me and on this Church. My Tupuna, my ancestors, are from Kotirana, Scotland. The place that has a close connection with his Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. My great-grandparents and grandparents emigrated from Scotland to New Zealand. I am wearing the Galloway tartan tonight on my tie! My great-grandfather James Galloway left Glasgow early last century to first farm in Saskatchewan, Canada before giving up on that for a much better option, Owaka in the South Otago! And think of my maternal grandmother, a woman of wonderful Christian faith, one Charlotte Law. Her relatives are buried in St Machar's Cathedral in Aberdeen! It is a church with a long history. Not only are my relatives buried there, but also a quarter of William Wallace - the famous Scot who was hung, drawn and quartered! St Machar's got his left quarter and it is buried in the walls of the Cathedral!

She immigrated from Aberdeen to New Zealand and settled in the South Canterbury town of Waimate, where my great-grandfather and grandfather, both George Law by name, were elders in the Presbyterian Church. Our connections with that Waimate Presbyterian

Church has seen baptisms, weddings and funerals take place there for over five generations of our whanau! So I acknowledge my ancestors, my links to Scotland and the Presbyterian faith imbedded in this lineage. We have a family photo we are proud of that speaks of these links in our tupuna. It is of Leonard Small, the Moderator of the Church of Scotland on a visit to New Zealand in 1967 surrounded with my proud Whanau.

While it is not possible for Te Aka Puaho and the past Moderator, Very Rev Fakaofu Kaio, to be present today for the handing over of the Te Korowai Tapu, that is something we look forward to when we meet in person.

There is another cloak that is passed on tonight that acknowledges this Scottish heritage in our Church and my ancestry. I ask Alan Simson to bring that cloak forward. Alan is now well into his 90s. He is an elder at Cashmere Presbyterian. He has been in my life since I arrived as a 4 year-old at Hoon Hay Presbyterian church; he was there when I preached my first sermon at an evening service at Hoon Hay in the early 1970s, and was there when I was ordained as an elder then as a minister! He represents a generation who have nurtured me. And with him, Jess Dreadon, one of a wonderful group of young leaders in the PCANZ who I have had the privilege to get to know. They bring to me a cloak given to me by Dorothy Thawley. Her late husband, Michael, was a Moderator of this Church, and his mentor, Bill Watt, gave it to him. Bill was given it by a Moderator of the Church of Scotland! I look forward to the Te Korowai Tapu as a cloak to celebrate our bicultural journey and the place of Te Aka Puaho in our Church. In the meantime, may this cloak also capture something of our Scottish roots and connections with this increasingly culturally diverse Church of ours!

To this cloak I add this stole, made by the people of my Cashmere parish for Michael Thawley when he became Moderator. I wear it as a reminder of the mountain and the river I identify with – that Cashmere Church nestled under Sugar Loaf, which has been a visible landmark from my homes, schooling, and life for much of life, *and* the Opawaho, Heathcote River, which has its origin very close to where we live in Aidanfield, I river where I went eeling as a youngster and along which I bike to get to my office in Cashmere.

And this stole, given by the people of Cashmere, reminds me of the people who have loved me and nurtured my ministry over nearly 40 years, the people of Hoon Hay Presbyterian where I grew up, St Stephen's in Timaru, St Andrew's College, Hope Presbyterian, and now Cashmere!

This cloak is symbolic tonight in other ways as well.

### **It is slightly too big for me!**

I thought of having it altered to fit, but then realised it symbolises the fact that this Moderator role seems slightly too big for me! I think of those who have gone before me. Fakaofu, a big man – not just in stature, but in loving heart. You chose relationship as your theme and you lived that out as you moved around this Church in what have been very trying times! You are much loved in this Church for that! And I think of my dear friend, the late Andrew Norton, who, if he had not died so tragically, would have been the Moderator

who was passing on the mantle today. A man also big in stature, but also in visionary, prophetic leadership! And so many more – I could talk for along time about the legacy left on this Church by the Moderators who have gone before! I am not sure I can fill out this cloak as they did, but, with God’s help, I will faithfully try to live up to the trust placed in me to moderate this PCANZ. The gap in the fit of the gown will ever be a reminder of the need to trust God in my inadequacies.

And there is something else about this cloak....

### **Passed down the generations**

I was a young minister on the Council of Assembly in the 1980s, and Michael Thawley was a wonderful mentor to me. And when I was in Wellington for meetings, he would arrange for me to stay with his mentor, Bill Watt. Bill and I would sit over supper at night and talk about this Presbyterian Church! So this cloak represents encouragement, nurture, empowering, from one generation to the next!

That is a theme so close to my heart!

Empowering Generations is the theme of the next 2-year moderatorial term.

I seriously reconsidered the theme in the face of our COVID crisis! Was it still right, I pondered? Then I had an encounter with a parishioner who told me her anxious granddaughter had rung from London: “Granma, I am so anxious about Covid and I am so far away. I know your faith calms you down and brings you peace, can you tell me about that?”

And then just recently a businessman friend told me about interaction in his business between the older and younger generations around how to cope with Covid. He was able to draw on to the resilience of a lifetime and talk of memories of times like the Christchurch earthquakes where they had to hold on tight and ride out the storm, while the young millennials were talking about creative ways to pivot the business in the new Covid challenged era!

### **The Empowering Generations theme**

This theme is not just about getting young people back to church. Rather it asks the question, what does each generation need and what does it give? Applying that to the church, it could mean the older generation needs to be pastored in old age, but they bring memory that builds resilience and hope and they bring enormous resources to hand on! The younger generation need connection, resourcing and empowerment, and they bring a youthful visionary ability to pivot to new ways of doing things. We need both!

Moses was passionate about this theme. Our first reading from Deuteronomy has him with the people on the cusp of the Promised Land, ‘the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year’. And the intergeneration transmission of faith is threaded through the Deuteronomy text, capturing Moses’ heart for this people. In the words of Walter

Brueggemann, "Deuteronomy always has its eyes on the education of the coming generation."

So, in our text, God is saying through Moses, love God with a passion; live that love out daily with all sorts of visual and oral reminders in order that the younger generations catch that love in their hearts! Love God and live out that love so that our youngsters will catch it.

I wonder if this message is even more poignant today in the Western world, where there is an increasing degree of collective amnesia around the things of Christian faith!

And the Gospel reading tonight feeds into this theme in a challenging way! Jesus is indignant that the disciples stopped the children from coming to him, they blocked the mothers and the children! The reasoning of the disciples was interesting, a little complex and yet understandable. Earlier in this Gospel, Jesus himself was looking to escape the crowds! They were protective of him, but also maybe buying into the cultural norms where women and children were low on the ranks of important people!

All this makes me think about the ways we can block the younger generations' access to the life-giving touch of Christ. This is a complex issue. There are many reasons why young people are often missing in our church, and some of those reasons are well beyond our control! But I would like to give 3 reasons that I think we can work on.

### **1. Hopelessness**

It is easy to get caught up in a loss of heart around the declining and aging demographic of our church life! At a church meeting dealing with the pending closure of a church with a tiny and aged congregation, one stalwart said 'I don't care if I am the last one left. I want my funeral in this church, you can turn the lights off after I am gone!'

Do we give in to that thinking? Simply own the sense of hopelessness and despair and see death as inevitable? Moses, through forty years in the desert, saw so much to cause him despair about the people of God and their fickle faith, but at the end of his life he calls them to remember all God has done. He does it with resilient, bright-eyed passion for the next generation!

We need to find this resilient, bright-eyed passion for the next generation of faith! While we need to humbly acknowledge our plight, let us dream dreams and have visions of a better future.

Today, the national Church team and I are launching a new website called 'Empowering Generations'. It will be populated with good news stories that help to inspire hope not despair.

### **2. Helplessness**

Many in our church have the desire to reach out but feel helpless and ill-equipped to do so. People say to me, "Where do we even start when there are no young people in your churches!?" I think we need to find ways to navigate past this helplessness by upskilling ourselves right across the Church. I think we need to make intergenerational

connection a wildly important goal and dig into the many resources emerging around this theme. That new Empowering Generations website has resources and blogs around the theme. On that website you can access information about workshops we are offering to parishes and presbyteries over the next two-years! Let's move from the helplessness that blocks the way to the younger generation to a renewed skill base of intergenerational connection.

### 3. Haplessness

We do not lack resources! We are resource rich. *But* those resources are so bound up in old wine skins. And I wonder if future generations of church will look back on this time and say of us what a hapless and unfortunate use of the resources at hand.

I have been reading 'Presbyterians in Aotearoa 1840-1990'. It is a great read for getting context on where we have come from as a Church. There was much that caught my attention. One of those things was being birthed about the time I was born, 1956. The New Life movement of the 1950s and 60s was amazingly successful in its goal to plant churches in our cities and towns two kilometres apart so that people could walk to church...and in the 1950s and 60s they did in their droves. *Now* those churches are often occupied by small aging congregations, clustered together in the suburbs built in the 60s, while great swathes of new sub-divisions have no Presbyterian church within cooee! I love the discussion we are having in the Church about releasing resources for new ways of being church, ways of connecting with new generations and new realities! As I have read the reports for this General Assembly I see common visionary threads emerging in reports like Church Property Trustees, PressGo, Working Together, Theology of Property and Money, that seek to lead us away from a stifling hopeless, helpless and hapless mindset to one that is visionary and positive.

I love the attitude of King David at the end of his life where 1 Chronicles 29 has him saying of Solomon, you are young and inexperienced but nevertheless I am going to give you a wealth of my resources to build a new temple, and I will try and convince the other older leaders to do the same, and he did!

I spoke recently at a KCML block course to our budding new ministers! I think of what is ahead of them and deeply desire that we continue to explore ways of reconfiguring our resources to give them a chance to reconfigure our mission rather than simply pastor our churches towards death!

### Conclusion

There is a great Philip Yancey quote on this: 'CK Chesterton names five moments in history, such as the fall of the Roman Empire and the period of Islamic conquest, when Christianity faced apparent doom. Each time, a fresh spirit of renewal emerged from the crisis and the faith revived. As Chesterton put it, when 'the Faith has to all appearances gone to the dogs ... it was the dog that died.' He adds, 'Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it has a God who knew the way out of the grave.'

May we be a people who are:

Hopeful and visionary

Equipped and empowered

Nimble and responsive

And I truly believe that intergenerational connection has a key part to play in this kind of future. David Kinnaman is president of Barna Group, a leading research and communications company that works with churches, non-profits, and businesses. In his 2016 book, 'You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church' he seeks to make sense of the extensive Barna research about intergenerational trends in church. His conclusion is revealing:

“Cultivating intergenerational relationships is one of the most important ways in which effective faith communities are developing flourishing faith in both young and old. In many churches, this means changing the metaphor from simply passing the baton to the next generation to a more functional, biblical picture of a body – that is, the entire community of faith, across the entire lifespan, working together to fulfil God’s purposes.”

Finally a story. I recently did a funeral for a faithful Christian woman. The family were gathered with her in her last days to plan the funeral. One of her children said, “Mum, you love your Bible, would you like it to go in the coffin with you?” she was weak but she sat up strong and said, “No way is that Bible going in the coffin, it is going to stay with you and you will read it!”

I asked her husband if I could share that story. “Yes,” he said, “She would love that!”

May it be that people tell stories of our passion for a faith passed down through the generations!