

## FEAR OR FREEDOM

At a recent meeting of Christian women here in Kaitaia, one of our number walked out because two others publicly commented on her perceived shortcomings. In a mere minute the feeling in the meeting went from pleasant to poisoned. I actually envied those amongst us who were deaf because they didn't get to hear the acid tones of the petty and unintelligent exchange.

At another meeting on the same day another group of women, this time Māori in Auckland, openly mocked and ridiculed a Christian woman who they perceived as being wrong for their organisation. Whether Hannah Tamaki should lead the Māori Women's Welfare League or not is a matter for their ballot box. Certainly the lady doesn't float my boat, but to belittle her for being a peroxide blonde was nothing but petty and unintelligent.

The presenting problems between these different groups of women are not unique to any gender, race, faith or age group. Instead they are symptomatic of some deeper difficulty. What is it that causes any one of us to act offensively, or react defensively? How can we feel right about hurting or being hurt? I believe that in every case the underlying cause is spiritual and is triggered by fear.

There is an old wisdom that says we are only as sick as our secrets. I would amend that to say that we are only as sick as our secret fears. I know what it is to regret saying something stupid or doing something dumb, and to know that it can't be unsaid or undone. In those cases I've had to watch the reactions of others play out, and know that they are beyond my control. I've had to face my own fears and failings, and admit to them. I've given and received forgiveness, and have experienced the freedom which comes with that.

As a Christian I've gotten used to some of my whānau looking at me sideways and making snide comments like, "The problem with Christianity is that it's full of Christians." At one level they're right, wherever there are people there are problems. But at another level they're wrong, because as someone wiser than me once said, the church is a hospital for sinners, not a hotel for saints.

Similarly, as a Māori I've gotten used to the Crown and its supporters treating me differently and then blaming me for that difference. At one level I'm hoha with them for projecting onto me their fear of losing power and control, especially to Māori. But at another level I feel sorry for them. No matter how much material wealth they garner, they still don't feel safe from Māori 'radicals.' Their fear is poisoning them. They need a hospital.

As one who has to regularly engage with these fearful folk, I can choose to either pass on their poison or to rise above the fears that lie beneath their behaviour. Every choice has a consequence, but the unique thing about the choice between fear or freedom is that they are also their own consequence. I choose freedom.