

On Friday afternoon, we held the funeral of Rex Mirams.

Many of you will have known Rex and his wife Karen as faithful members of this congregation for many years.

Rex served as a member of vestry, as a sidesperson, and as a member of the Tuesday Gang.

But aside from these roles, and his many other qualities and achievements, you may know that Rex also held a PhD in Botany.

His was the first PhD in Botany awarded by the then newly constituted University of Auckland, which had previously been the University of New Zealand.

And Bruce Burns, one of the people who spoke at his funeral, an associate professor at the university, told us how significant Rex's research into Kauri tree regeneration had been at the time and still is today.

Clearly, Rex had made a significant and lasting contribution to our body of knowledge in that particular field.

And I wonder if that, at some time or other, has been a dream for all of us, as well. Not that we had all graduated with a PhD in Botany and produced research of lasting value regarding kauri regeneration,

but that we will have made a meaningful contribution somehow to the world around us,

or, to put it another way, that we will have done something good with our lives, that we will have made a difference and that we might be remembered for that.

And maybe it's that "being remembered" that is important to us, after all most of us have some kind of ego about that sort of thing.

I would love to be the one responsible for world peace and finally ending global poverty.

I think my ego could stand being remembered for that!

But putting our egos aside, at least in that kind of way, I wonder whether that question about the meaning and significance of our lives, the contribution that we make to the world, is a question that we may have asked ourselves at one time or another, and may, in fact, continue to ask ourselves.

What am I supposed to do with my life?

What is my purpose in the world?

And maybe you have an answer to that question.

Maybe you put that one to bed a long time ago.

But just in case you haven't, I want to draw your attention to the words that welcomed us into worship this morning,

E te whānau a te Karaiti,
welcome to this holy table;
welcome to you,
for we are Christ's body,
Christ's work in the world.

Who are we and what is our purpose?

We are the family of Christ, the body of Christ.
And we are Christ's work in the world.

So what does it mean to be "Christ's work in the world"?

Well, two things, I think.

Firstly, to be "Christ's work in the world" means that Christ is at work within us and that we are, in fact, works in progress.

Christ is doing something within us and is continuing to do something in us, changing us, making us more like Christ, aligning and realigning the intentions of our hearts according to God's good purpose, remaking us in love, showering us with love and mercy and grace and goodness and the promise of healing and wholeness so that we might be more fully alive, more fully human, and so that what may come out of us is more fully reflective of God's presence and purpose in the world.

And I, for one, think that is incredibly good news.

I don't know about you but I could do with a lot more serious work under the hood to make me a more loving and compassionate person!

It takes a lot of lovin' to make us more lovin' but the good news is that God seems to have plenty of love to spare and plenty of love to share to make that happen!

Secondly, to be Christ's work in the world is to know that Christ is at work in the world through us.

God is doing God's thing in the world through us.

St Teresa of Avila talked about us being the hands and feet of Christ, doing God's work in the world.

And most of the time that work that God is doing through us does not seem to be on a particularly grand scale, at least not when it comes to any particular individual.

After all, most of us do not spend our days single-handedly finding a cure for cancer or bringing an end to global poverty or reconciling warring nations by the strength of our personalities.

We are not rushing into burning buildings or lifting cars with impossible feats of strength in order to rescue trapped children.

Most of the time, the work that God is doing through us may not seem particularly heroic.

Most of the time, that work is much smaller, far subtler, and altogether more ordinary and everyday.

Because most of the time that work is made up of all those small acts and gestures of kindness and generosity and forgiveness and empathy and understanding and solidarity and sympathy that we share with one another everyday.

That is the work of God in and through us.

And when you think about it, a hundred million acts of kindness and generosity, a billion acts of forgiveness and empathy, a gazillion acts of sympathy and understanding, across the world everyday is actually work on quite a grand scale.

And that is the work that God is doing in and through us.

As we heard from The Letter of James this morning,

“Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights”.

Every act of generosity and love and forgiveness and mercy and kindness comes from God and is the work of God within us and between us.

So, that’s who we are people!

We are the body of Christ, Christ’s work in the world.

Now, maybe that won’t answer the question of whether you should be a nurse or a teacher or an anthropologist or a scientist or a social worker or a banker or a financial advisor or a dentist or a politician or a grave digger or a retail assistant or whatever.

But it does tell us who we are.

We are the body of Christ and we are Christ’s work in the world.