

## Flourishing at the Foot of the Cross

Sunday 15 March, 2026

4th Sunday in Lent / Mothering Sunday

Exodus 2:1–10 | Colossians 3:12–17 | John 19:25–27

Mt Maunganui Parish

In the name of God, te Matua, te Tama, me te Wairua Tapu, Amine.

Mothering Sunday invites us to remember those people and places that have nurtured us—those who have held us, formed us, and pointed us toward hope. It is a day for gratitude, yes—but also a day for truth-telling. Because mothering in Scripture is never sentimental. It is courageous, protective, and costly. It defends life where life is threatened. It opens a future where none seems possible.

We come to this Sunday here at Mt Maunganui with tender hearts. This community has walked through landslides that took dear lives—friends, neighbours, visitors, members of your church whānau. Over the past two years through change in use of buildings and ways of gathering as a parish, you have borne grief together and discovered resilience together. In the midst of that, your priest, Sue, and your Wardens have led with faith, imagination, and steadiness as this parish has re-imagined its life and mission. For that leadership we give thanks.

And we hold all of this within our diocesan vision: Oranga Ake o Te Iwi o Te Ao—the flourishing of life for all people. Today’s readings show us what that flourishing looks like in the Bible’s own terms, and how God calls a community—this community—to embody it.

*Exodus 2:1–10 — Arks of life in a world of threat*

Exodus opens under Pharaoh’s violent decree against Hebrew boys. Into this danger, a woman bears a son and, as the Hebrew says, she “saw that he was good” (*tov*, the same word used in Genesis 1 for God’s delight in creation). She makes a *papyrus basket*—in Hebrew a *tevah*—the only other time that word appears is Noah’s ark. In Scripture, a *tevah* is a vessel of salvation: a fragile craft entrusted to God on dangerous waters.

Notice how deliverance unfolds. Not through spectacle, but through a chain of courageous women:

- a mother who risks everything,
- a sister who watches and intervenes with wisdom,
- and Pharaoh’s own daughter who acts with compassion against the logic of her father’s power.

God’s saving work is carried along by human faithfulness, tenderness, and courage. This is biblical mothering: the fierce, creative commitment to protect vulnerable life.

It is also the heart of Oranga Ake—a theological stance that says life is sacred, every life bears God’s image, and the people of God are called to tiaki, to protect, nurture, and create conditions where life can grow.

You have done this in your own hour of testing. When the ground gave way—literally—this parish fashioned small arks of care: phone calls, vigils, practical help, presence. You became the hands that lifted neighbours “out of the water,” the eyes that kept watch when others were exhausted, the hearts that refused to let grief have the last word. That is Exodus faith. That is *orange ake* in practice.

*Colossians 3:12–17 — Clothing a community for flourishing*

Paul turns from the work God has done in Christ to the work Christ now does in us. “Clothe yourselves,” he says—*endusasthe*—put on deliberately and daily compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. These are not feelings but disciplines. They are the habitus of a people being renewed in Christ’s image.

He continues: “Bear with one another... forgive each other... Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Harmony here is not the absence of tension; it is the grace to remain united amid strain. It is the strong, supple bond of love that holds when pressure comes.

Then Paul offers a centre for all our discerning: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.” The verb, *brabeuō*, (Brab-i-on) is the term for an umpire—Christ’s peace is the deciding voice when choices are unclear, the inner arbiter amid competing goods.

This is the character of a community that makes room for the flourishing of life:

- compassion that dignifies every person,
- patience that refuses to rush past grief,
- humility that listens,
- forgiveness that heals memory,
- and love that binds.

In diocesan language, this is Oranga Ake expressed as *manaakitanga*—a generous hospitality of heart and practice; as *whanaungatanga*—relationships of mutual belonging; and as *kaitiakitanga*—the wise stewardship of people and place, especially important here after landslides. *Oranga Ake* isn’t achieved by power or speed, but by the slow, steady weaving of these virtues into our common life.

Over the past two years, guided by Sue and your Wardens, you have *worn* these garments. You have let Christ’s peace be the umpire as you re-imagined how to worship, serve, and care. And you’ve allowed the word of Christ to dwell richly among you—in the psalms you have prayed through tears, in the hymns that have held your faith when words were hard to find, and in the shared wisdom of the Body. This is a parish clothed for flourishing.

*John 19:25–27 — A new family at the foot of the Cross*

At the cross, Jesus speaks to his mother and to the beloved disciple: “Woman, here is your son... Here is your mother.” In the very moment when death shouts its “no,” Jesus creates a new family bound not by blood but by love. He entrusts Mary and the disciple to one another; he founds a community where care, responsibility, and belonging are the conditions of life.

This is Mothering Sunday at its deepest: not only gratitude for mothers and those who mother us, but gratitude for Mother Church—the community Christ creates, where we become family to one another.

This is also Oranga Ake at its most cross-shaped: flourishing does not mean ease or abundance; it means a community able to make room for life even in the shadow of suffering—a people who say, “Here is your mother; here is your son; here is your neighbour,” and then live as if it were true.

You have done that here. Through grief, you have become family to one another. You have held sorrow without letting it isolate those who carry it most. You have shared burdens; you have permitted yourselves to be helped. This is the Gospel lived at street level. This is the flourishing God desires.

*Drawing the threads together: Oranga Ake o Te Iwi o Te Ao*

When we hold these readings together, a pattern emerges:

- Exodus shows us God’s deliverance taking shape through human acts that protect life—small arks built in dangerous waters.
- Colossians forms our imagination for a community whose habits enable life to flourish—virtues we intentionally “put on” so that dignity, healing, and hope can take root.
- John reveals a cruciform community, where Jesus forms whānau at the place of pain—relationships of belonging and responsibility that become the soil of new life.

This is the theological heart of Oranga Ake o Te Iwi o Te Ao: that God’s desire is not merely for survival, but for flourishing—for a life made whole in relationship with God, with one another, and with creation.

And flourishing, biblically speaking, is communal:

- It is the courage of Exodus women standing against systems that devalue life.
- It is the Colossians wardrobe of compassion and humility that shapes us into Christ’s likeness.
- It is the cross-forged kinship of John, where love makes a family capable of holding grief and nurturing hope.

For a parish shaped by recent tragedy, Oranga Ake will look like:

- continuing to protect and honour vulnerable life (tiaki), advocating for safety and care in your neighbourhoods;
- choosing virtues over velocity in parish decisions, so that re-imagining is patient, participatory, and healing;
- deepening belonging (whanaungatanga), especially for those most affected by loss;
- practicing manaakitanga in worship and hospitality, so that every person is seen, named, and welcomed;
- embracing kaitiakitanga for your place—caring for land and waterways as part of God’s creation, learning from the land’s fragility what wise stewardship requires.

In other words, keep building arks of care, keep wearing the garments of Christ, and keep forming family at the foot of the cross.

### *Encouragement for the season ahead*

Sue and the Wardens, Barbara and John, members of Vestry, those who lead ministries within the parish, as you continue to shepherd this community, hear this word of encouragement:

- From Exodus: Trust that God’s salvation often begins with small, faithful acts. Keep crafting *tevah*-moments—practical mercies that protect life and open a future.
- From Colossians: Let Christ’s peace be the umpire as you discern next steps. When paths are complex and choices costly, return to the wardrobe of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience—and love above all. These are the clothes of flourishing.
- From John: Stay at the foot of the cross together. Keep receiving the family Christ gives you. Let your shared care be the sign that life is already rising in your midst.

This is the way of Oranga Ake o Te Iwi o Te Ao—the flourishing of life for all people: a parish that protects, a parish that blesses, a parish that belongs, a parish that stewards, a parish that hopes.

Some of you are carrying fresh grief today. Some carry the long fatigue that follows crisis. Some are quietly hopeful. Wherever you are, you are held—by God, and by this community.

God, who guided a small ark through the reeds, is guiding you.

Christ, who created family at the cross, is binding you together.

The Spirit, who clothes the Church with courage and compassion, is breathing new life into you.

May this parish continue to be a place where orange ake—God’s flourishing life—finds room to grow: where wounds find healing, where questions are welcomed, where songs and silence both have their place, where neighbours become whānau, and where hope is patiently tended, season by season.

Amen.