

Whanau – Family

Josie Te Kahu

This summer, influenced by the uninterrupted coverage of world cricket, our whanau began to spend the warm summer evenings outdoors playing cricket.

Here, under the tutoring of his older siblings and dad, and often emulating the professionals on Sky sport, our 8 year old son came into his own, matching his dad and older brothers with some ‘mean’ bowling and batting, that caused him to be recognised as an equal (we are young/old adults. He is an 8 year old).

He may still have to go to bed early, but he does so knowing that he is a valued whanau member and equally important as his parents and siblings. It truly is wonderful seeing his confidence and elation grow as he goes to sleep knowing that he just bowled his brother or dad out.

And that, right there, is whanau. Everyone matters.

Whanau is such an important part of my life, and I find that I can’t talk about my sons any other way except in the context of being whanau.

Togetherness is a big part of who we are. From attending the local Bee Keepers monthly meets, together, to gathering to partake of the elements at communion - we do it together (our older sons sit together at the middle front section of church and we tend to sit at the back with our youngest aspiring cricketer. Once Rewai, Joshua and I head to the front to grab our bread and grape juice, we are quietly joined by Manakinui & Caleb. We then sit together, pray and partake – as a whanau).

Our sons are 19, 17 and 8 years old and we aren’t in hurry for the day, when serving the Lord may mean we do this from different spaces and places, and so togetherness is what we do and treasure.

Last year, my dad passed away, and at his tangi, in to the wee hours of the morning, the rākau was passed around in the wharenuī. As each person was passed the stick (rākau) they stood and talked about dad and his life. My dad had retired by the time my sons were born, so as they sat and listened to the stories of his life, serving the Lord in ministry, they were in awe of this wonderful man that had only ever been ‘their papa’.

Many years ago, when Caleb (17) was a toddler, a man name Bob Joyce saw his face and said “this must be Jim Martin’s moko. I’d recognise that Mapi face anywhere” (Mapi is my father’s mum’s maiden name – the Mapi’s have distinctive facial features). We saw there, the enactment of the word ‘mokopuna’ (moko, as in a facial ‘moko’ and ‘puna’ - meaning pool). Looking at a grandchild is like looking at your own reflection in a mirror. It was a proud moment for me, when Caleb leaned over and said to me at his papa’s tangi, mum I’m proud to look like my papa. I see my dad in my oldest son too. Nui serves faithfully, without a big hoorrah, just like his papa did.

In these moments, our sons learn that they are important. Valued. We’ve taught them about Godly character. It has been the basis of our parenting style.

We’ve heard from God through our whanau and made many decisions based on whanau. Decisions like being a one income whanau, home schooling (of our third child). Our oldest son became a teen when we were posted to Waiouru Military Camp. With our second son fast approaching his teen years, we specifically requested to be posted to Linton Camp Palmerston North, so that they can attend a Christian youth group.

It is here, at Central Baptist (CB), that we currently attend. They had spent their younger years fitting in with our lives as we served God that we wanted to be sure that they grew in their own personal faith. This is what we told them “Your own personal faith is so important to us, that we want you two to choose the church we attend”. We hoped and prayed that it would be CB but to be sincere about our promise, we didn’t say this.

We moved to Palmy and attended a local church the very next day. There are several churches in PN so we planned to visit as often and as long as it took; till the boys found a place they could call their spiritual home. It was December 2009 and since it was close to Christmas, we decided to attend CB and start looking, again, in the new year when all the programs were up and running (not a strategy, I promise you!).

Come the New Year, we said to our sons “Well, now is probably a good time to start visiting, where shall we start?” Their reply was simple. “It’s ok here, mum and dad. Why don’t we give CB a go”. We were very pleased as CB played a big part in Rewai’s youth years and in the formation of his Christian faith. It is also the church that faithfully prayerfully and financially during our early years of ministry. That was five years ago. Our two older boys were baptised and they serve here at CB.

Fickle right? I mean our whanau might have been listening to hard rock each Sunday, and possibly swinging from the chandeliers if our sons’ chose this style of worship.

But here’s the thing! We never expected them to make a wrong decision. We trusted them and wanted them to know that they are important and valued. This part of our lives was about their faith journey.

We have always given preference to whanau. Whanau has come second only to God, which doesn’t even make sense as I write that – in fact I’m just writing it in case you, the reader, think that we give preference to whanau over God. It’s not like that at all. We serve God, as a whanau and He engages us as a whanau and takes each of us into consideration, and cares for us all equally....hmmm, yes! That’s whanau.