

On the Monday morning after the shootings I went to Cashmere High School. They had their big school assemblies where they were told about the two students who had died at the mosque and the other fathers, brothers and family members shot. I have never experienced anything like the total pervasive shock, grief and dismay that everyone in the school shared that morning. It took me days to recover, and I was only there a few hours.

The school counsellors and youth workers had set up an informal hang-out space and I sat there talking to kids as they sat and made paper chains with messages of peace on. One young boy just sat there looking stunned. When I asked him what he was thinking he just said 'Why? Why would anyone do that?'

How would you have answered him, I wonder.

And this week I met up with Head Boy Okirano Tilala, and bought him a hot chocolate and piece of fudge – the least I could do for his extraordinary efforts of the previous two weeks. I was fascinated to meet him and hear about how it had been for him – he wrote all his speeches himself, you know. Turns out, he is a deep-thinking Christian boy, both his parents Samoan pastors, who gained his inspiration and strength from reading the Bible and watching videos of Martin Luther King. But when I asked him what he was struggling with, he said the same thing as that other young boy.

"Why? I just cannot understand why someone would do such a thing."

This time I had an answer. Not an easy answer. My answer to Oki was that it's really quite simple. The shooter felt the same about the people in the mosques as you and I might feel about a plague of cockroaches. That's how evil works, I said to Oki. It dehumanises other people, and in the process it strips us of our humanity. It stops us from seeing other people as people.

And the reverse of that was the powerful message that rung through the National Remembrance service on Friday – we are one because we are all human. Every man is my brother, every woman is my sister, declared survivor Farid Ahmed

This rings true with what Jesus taught and how Jesus lived. His parable of the lost sheep is exactly that message. Each person matters. God loves every person, all matter. Like a good shepherd God seeks the lost. No one is expendable. No one is irrelevant. This is the starting point of Christian ethics. It is the starting point for facing up to our own prejudices, our own racist attitudes. How far will our hearts stretch in kinship with people who do not look like us or act like us or dress like us?

Way back in January – it feels like an eon ago – I wrote the Lenten study on the topic "For God so loved the world", around a central claim that God loves not only the human world but also the natural world.

This week's study is about the animals who share this world of ours.

In the study this week I invite you to reflect on the animals you love and the animals you appreciate, and to become more aware of how these creatures enrich our understanding of who God is, in their diversity, in the love they share with us, in their playfulness, in their beauty.

This time last week I was not in church. I was sitting under a knarly old pine tree on top of a ridge in our friend's farm in the Central Hawkes Bay. I was praying, upset about the shootings, upset for the young people shaken to the core by violence they cannot begin to comprehend, shaken up yet again after living so much of their lives on shaking ground. As

I prayed I felt the spirit of Jesus come close to me and speak truth and peace into me, and as I prayed, for the whole time I was there praying, a grey warbler sang over me. It just sat there in the top of the tree and sang, and it was the sweetest of songs.

I have no doubt that God can communicate with us through any and all of his creatures, and that we need all of God's creatures to live and thrive on this planet we share.

And I have no doubt that God calls us to care for all living creatures, just like the farmer in Jesus' story cared for all of his flock, and didn't abandon even one.

*Discussion – about the animals we love and appreciate*

The problem is that we get stuck in a trap of thinking that we have to choose our priorities – either we care for people or we care for the environment. Either we make jobs and protect businesses and profits, or we protect the natural world. So ecosystems get destroyed because people get priority over nature. It's a false dichotomy. It's lousy logic. The Bible calls us into right relationships, with God, with each other, and with the natural world. This is what we call Stewardship.

The alternative is shockingly brutally obvious. We have seen where broken relationships, racism and prejudice get us, and with our Prime Minister we declare that they are not welcome here.

We can also see abundantly clearly where the abuse of our natural world gets us, as so many species face extinction, as insect populations plummet, as forests continue to be destroyed. And now more than ever before we are realising how interconnected we all are, human and animal, how inter-dependent.

This week as we continue to recover from the trauma that has rocked us to the core, let us rest in nature. Let us notice and appreciate all the creatures that we share this world with. My prayer is that we will grow clearer and stronger in our own voice here in Christchurch, as we are watched by the world, as we uphold our young people, as we care for the world around us.