



Auckland Unitarian Church

Love beyond belief

It's written in the stars

Clay Nelson © 26 June 2022

Welcome this morning to history. This is the first public celebration of an indigenous peoples' holiday in the world. Matariki, sometimes referred to as the Maori New Year, has become a celebration for all New Zealanders. It centres on a cluster of stars that in the west were known as The Pleiades or Seven Sisters. They are 410 light years away and are part of the constellation Taurus.

The Maori named them after the brightest of nine stars called Matariki, the mother of the other eight. Each star is honoured for a specific thing.

Probably forever people everywhere have been fascinated by the night sky. If you have ever been in a remote location far from the pollution of city lights on a moonless night, the stars are a staggering, awe-inspiring, humbling, mystical sight. This has been the night sky people saw every cloudless night before Edison gave us light. In the 16th century people looked to the stars for omens and to predict the future. They were considered the source of our fate and the idea that our lives are written in the stars, spawning the popularity of horoscopes.

Some resisted this notion. In his play *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare has Cassius say to Brutus "The fault...is not in our stars, But in ourselves."

Far away from these western influences Maori and other Polynesian people viewed the stars quite differently. They were god-like beings helping us to navigate life. They called for us to remember those who preceded us. They called us to unity. They called us to care for our environment. They called us to dream. The celebration of Matariki at the Winter Solstice was a reminder to be fully human not by chance but by choice.

I was struck in my exploration of Matariki of how much Unitarians have in common with this celebration, in particular our values. There are a number of key values that were associated with Matariki and the Māori New Year celebrations. The values upheld are:

- Love and respect for one another
- Remembrance

- Unity
- Caring
- Sharing
- Environmental awareness
- Feasting
- Discussion
- Coming together
- Kindness
- Celebrations
- Identity

Each of these values can find a place in the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism. We need no other reason to celebrate Matariki with Tangata Whenua. For we are all children of Matariki.

I had not heard of Matariki before being adopted by Aotearoa New Zealand. Over the years I have heard reference to it, but I remained ignorant of the gift it offered. So, for my own edification, and possibly yours, I am dedicating the rest of this service to learning more about this celebration from Maori voices.

Meditation / Conversation Starter:-

Who are you remembering?
What are your dreams?