

Sermon Archive 138

Sunday 26 February 2017

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lessons: 2 Peter 1: 16 - 21
Matthew 17: 1-9

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Four monologues.

-ooOoo-

Jesus speaks to Peter.

I'm very proud of you, Peter. On the cusp of your last few days of life, I'm remembering how it began for us, all that time ago, when first I called you away from fishing. I was pleased you had the gumption to say "yes". Many would have chosen to stay in the boat – to stick with the status quo. But you had enough adventurous spirit to give the experiment a go. You became a brand new student of "living by faith". Can you remember whether you ever quizzed me on how it was going to work? Where the food would come from? What we'd do for money? For God's sake, where we were going and how we'd know when we'd got there?

I wonder, now you're an old man, whether you've ever looked back at that young one, and found amazement at how green he was – how "wet behind the ears"! Yet to know how to live with empty hands. Yet to process that it's all about picking up a cross. Yet to weep at the crowing of a rooster. All of that "living by faith" yet to be lived. Imperfect Peter, you listened to me. You were open to me. And at times that required huge stretching of your heart and mind.

Do you remember that thing on the mountain? The light? The cloud? I knew you'd no idea what was going on. And I realised there was no point in talking about it. I seem to remember simply saying "don't talk about this till later. Put it off till after Easter". So the only recorded statement on the day was your offer to build three little shrines – houses for a vision that already was over. You were a young man struggling to describe the things he's seeing, that are forming his soul, that are stirring up his heart. He's a work in progress - a bewildered believer "becoming".

Well Peter, now you're older - and I'll even give you "wiser". You've a few more words assembled now to describe things spiritual and strange. Or maybe you're just more happy not to have to say anything. Giving silence, wonder, humility. I sense that some of the things that used to confuse you about "living by faith" now have become things that you quietly cherish. "Problems to be solved" have been allowed to become "mysteries to be treasured". Bright light for brash analysis has dimmed to a warmer glow - a candle glowing in the corner of the spirit - until something rises in the heart . . .

I have always loved you, Peter. And I have always wanted you to know that. Now that you're an old man, and entering your last few days, I remind you of the light that you have seen in me - the light that shows forth the love within which we are held. Even if these last few days turn out to be days of darkness for you, keep that lamp shining, Peter, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your heart. Resurrection is coming!

That was Jesus, speaking to Peter.

-ooOoo-

This is Peter, speaking to Matthew.

Hello Matthew. Sorry for startling you! No, you're right: it's not every day that a dead disciple interrupts the sermon writing. And no, it doesn't make sense - as little sense as Moses and Elijah turning up on Jesus' timeline. Let's just let that go! Yet, in keeping with the theme of things not quite fitting, I see you're trying to squeeze a sermon out of the second "Letter of Peter". Good luck with that! You know, don't you, that I didn't write it? The style's a few hundred years too modern to have come from my pen. So there's another slightly messy thing in a messy world of "trying to believe". I'm glad the letter got written, though, and I'm happy it bears my name. It's nice, in a way, to feel like people wanted my name on it, that someone thought it worthwhile asking "what would Peter have said" - as if my life had something in it that people could learn from.

Part of the appeal of that idea, I reckon, is that I'd never much been presented as someone to learn from. Impetuous, of course. Slow to learn, indeed. Following every tiny insight with a vast extrapolation into error - every time. In some of the gospel material, I'm almost comically stupid. A case in point: my building-zone response to the mystery of transfiguration. (Ooo, there's the glory of God, let's build it into a box.) Mark's version even says "Peter said this because he didn't know what to say!" He also described me as "terrified" - babbling and hysterical!

So it was nice, even if it was years after I'd died, to have someone want to put my

name on something “shining wise”. And it was good that it gave me a second script for the bungled transfiguration. This time, no mention of boxes or babbling. This time it’s the reflection of a wise person, giving calm testimony. This time it’s the mellowed, worshipful recalling of the glory. This time, it’s someone dressed in reliability – an eye-witness whose testimony is to be trusted. But particularly, this time, it’s someone bringing the whole mystery to others for their encouragement. This second-time Peter says “you too, you who come after me, should remember this glory. For in your darker days, it will be for you a lamp shining in darkness, “until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts”.

I am grateful, Matthew, to have been presented in this way. I can think of no greater honour than to be considered someone who knows how to turn mystery into encouragement.

If your sermon says nothing more than that, then maybe a lamp has started shining.

That was Peter, speaking to Matthew.

-ooOoo-

This is Matthew, speaking to Jesus.

Hello Jesus. Hey, I’ve just been talking to Peter. I’ve got to say he’s not very much like I expected him to be. He seems much less sure in himself than the figure I’ve seen in the gospels. Maybe I’ve just heard him wrong today (or projected my own stuff onto his situation), but he seemed really insecure about how he was going to be remembered. He told me that the Peter of the gospels was a bit of a comic figure; and I get that. And I can understand how it would make the real Peter feel a bit vulnerable. But the real Peter would also have to acknowledge that his gospel self wasn’t only comical – but was also totally “action”. He did things. He spoke up. He got on with it. Big and wide in the gospels was the Peter who moved. And you’d think, wouldn’t you, that that aspect of how he’d been presented would give big light to the actual Peter. (“Wow, I’m being presented as an action man!”)

But there it is. I’ve just been talking to someone who’s spent a good part of his story getting things wrong, and grieving it. I’ve been talking to someone who’s not really confident about where he’s going, and how he’s going to be remembered. Given that *that* Peter has emerged from my own imagination, maybe there’s a bit of *my* insecurity being projected. Maybe *I’m* the one spending a good deal of my life wondering about who we are, what we’re

becoming, what it means when we agree to live by faith. Maybe *I'm* the one sifting glory from the cleverly devised myths and confusions.

I wonder, Jesus, as I express all this to you, whether this is anything familiar. At the start of your ministry, when you were baptised, a voice from heaven said "This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased". At the transfiguration, a voice from heaven said "This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased". Word for word the same – like there was never any doubt about who you were, whether you were loved, how your life was rooted in the pleasure of God. That word, that truth, that light must have been a remarkable comfort to you – like a light shining for you in the dark. Transfiguration as a gift of certain affirmation for those waiting for the dawn.

Thank you for listening, Jesus. I'm not quite sure how to finish this sermon. Maybe I'll go and make a cup of tea – think about it later, after you've risen from the dead.

That was Matthew, speaking to Jesus.

-ooOoo-

This is Jesus speaking – speaking to whoever is listening. Are you listening? The voice called you to!

I had the tremendous blessing of being able to see God's light shining on my life. I knew I belonged to God. I knew I was loved. And I know that I managed to pass that on to Peter. He too was able to know that God is with us, and that we are loved. Somehow he managed to affirm that as something we all should carry. My gift for you today (through funny old Peter), is to ask you to be attentive to the light that shone on us – to let it be, for you, as it was for us, a lamp shining in a dark place – until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. This is for you as well. You will know this, see this, hear this, if you are listening to me.

Your minister doesn't know how to finish his sermon. He's gone off to make a cup of tea. That's fine. We all need tea. I say to you that a light shone on us. We knew who we were, and that we were loved. You also can put that into your heart. Let **that** be the end of the sermon – and the beginning of the rising in your hearts of the shining of the lamp.

Amen.

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