

Sermon Archive 148

Sunday 23 April 2017

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lessons: Romans 8: 18-25
John 20: 19-31

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



This sermon was preached in preparation for the second Mission Discernment Forum, one of five mission forums Knox is using to discern its next chapter. For context and wider detail of the forums, go to the recent Mission Discernment edition of Knox Life:

http://www.knoxchurch.co.nz/data/knoxlife/201702210000_Knox%20Life%20-%20Mission%20Discernment%20Edition.pdf

Also part of the service at which this sermon was preached was the acknowledgement of the retirement of our long standing Church Secretary, Diane Harrington.

Since we also had a Mission Discernment update, and an ANZAC greeting from a French exchange student, I worked hard to keep this sermon very short.

-ooOoo-

A brief sermon about transitions. Transitions – sometimes abrupt and jarring, sometimes long, smooth, almost undetectable. Sometimes sad, and sometimes thrilling. In each case, it's a moving from one way of living or being, to another.

Four transitions come to mind.

Di is retiring. On Monday morning she doesn't have to come to work. If it's a rainy day (as indeed the forecast predicts), the turning over of

the pillow for another snatch of sleep will be a welcome change.

I remember when my father retired, we were anxious. We imagined him doing nothing, becoming bored, gradually getting depressed. We told him that he needed to join a bowling club, go to U3A, take up various hobbies, fill up his life with all manner of stuff. His reaction to our encouragement was to reject it. “For goodness sake”, he said, “leave me alone. I’ll work it out myself, in my own time, as I get used to not going to work”. Dad is now into his thirtieth year of retirement. He’s really good at it. I don’t know why we were so anxious about him retiring. Maybe it’s just that transitions always involve a degree of the unknown – and into the unknown we easily insert our fear.

Here’s a second transition. A small, frightened group, cowering behind locked doors. They’re about to become a flaming, vast, spirited movement of hope and faith. They don’t get it yet. At the moment all they know is the great unknown over their lives. They don’t know what’s happened to Jesus. They don’t know what to do with the resurrection rumours. They don’t know what the Romans’ plans are for Jesus’ followers. So there’s a whole lot of the unknown into which they can insert their fear. In fear they lock the doors. In fear, they surround themselves only with people they know really well. In fear they bar the rest of the world from getting in.

We’ll come back to how Jesus works with them. But for now, we simply note that a major transition is on its way. Soon they will be different.

A third transition. St Paul says that the whole of creation is like a woman in childbirth. Something new is being born from the old, and yes, the birth will be painful. The result will be wonderful, but the transition will be difficult. Paul is actually saying that life (perhaps the whole of life) is one big transition. Most things will pass. Most will change. Some things will develop and grow, because the One who made it all, now is re-making it all. Back to the God who says

“Behold, I’m doing a new thing! Don’t you see it?”

And within that great transition that is God’s new thing, a fourth transition is found: a church in Christchurch continuing to explore its calling, to discern its mission, to seek a part in God’s work of re-creation. There’s enough of the unknown in it for a little bit of fear to be inserted. Maybe not fear that’s going to lock the doors or banish the world, but still a little bit of fear.

God says to the fear “let it go”. On the first evening of the first Easter, God reveals again the presence of Jesus among the people – courage-giving Jesus. Yes, they’d locked doors and withdrawn. God reaffirms the presence of Jesus. And this re-affirmed Jesus wishes the people peace, and gently, as gentle as breath, says “As I’ve been sent to you, so now you are sent to others.” So we’re told “forgive one another. Free one another. Receive life in my name.”

Life is one continuous transition, and transitions can be scary. In John 20 we read of a God who gently leads a community, through transition, from its early fear into its first few stirrings of faith. We read of a God who gives them all, easy-believers and sceptics alike, what they need in order to have faith.

And we read a little note from the author to us – the readers. It says “Jesus did so many other things which are not written here. But these are written *for you*, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and may have life in his name.”

Take that into your transition! Have no fear! Be encouraged to believe in Jesus. Receive the Easter gift of life, and look to your life for tomorrow!

Amen.

The Knox Church website is at: <http://www.knoxchurch.co.nz.html> . Sermons are to be found under News / Sermons.