

Sermon Archive 205

Sunday 24 June, 2018

Knox Church, Christchurch

A series of readings and reflections

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KNOX CHURCH

love faith outreach community justice

Today we dedicated the stained glass window newly gifted by John and Ann Hercus. The window features images of a Cantabrian landscape – with sky, mountains, plains and rivers. Rather than preach a sermon on a single text, I produced a series of readings, reflections and pieces of music (played by the Director of Music).



The First Lesson: Psalm 57: 5, 7-11

A Reflection: Sky

Entrepreneur business person and rocket scientist, Peter Beck. From the Mahia Peninsular, Peter started launching rockets into space - carrying small-ish objects into orbit for high-flying clients. Satellites, transmitters, scientific equipment - nothing of world-shattering interest to John or Jane Citizen. But then there was the humanity star. It was a satellite, with a one metre diameter, bearing 65 shiny faces, designed to do nothing other than sparkle. Orbiting the planet every 92 minutes, structured like a large disco ball, it caught the sun's light and reflected it back towards earth. Not to produce heat - just to put a sparkle in the sky. It was Peter's hope that this sparkling would lift up the eyes of "all people that on earth do dwell", and make them feel more conscious of their place in the world, more aware of the unity of humanity. "Look up" said Peter.

For the two months that it flew, some called it "Peter's folly". Some complained about space junk. But others did look up. For them, there was something about the sky, looking to the sky, letting the sky speak, that spoke to their worth, to their feeling of fitting within an order, to their sense of belonging to humanity - and all this with a kind of distant sparkle.

A psalmist comes to believe in the mystery of being loved by the maker of the universe. He seeks to articulate a sense of his life being a gift from One who is faithful. Searching for a phrase to express it, he turns to the sky. "Your steadfast love is as high as the heavens; your faithfulness extends to the clouds."

The sky becomes the way we speak of divine concern, of our gifted place on this planet, of our living beneath a love that doesn't falter. The sky is part of the picture.

Musical Reflection: Pegasus
Karen Tanaka

The Second Lesson: Psalm 65: 5b-13

A Reflection: Mountains, valleys and hills

The mountains, the hills, the valleys and plains - the land.

Land in our place and time is a complicated one. The land moves and the window breaks. The same forces that fold the mountains, that slowly wear the rock into alluvium for the plain, are forces that shake the people - that make them speak of deeds of terror and the need for deliverance. For us, the mountains *haven't* been

fixed in their place. And yet they are beautiful. Yet they stand, snow-topped, back-dropping the city. Yet they are huge, they are strong. And the dwellers at the ends of the earth hold them as signs.

A psalmist comes to believe in the providence of God, in the foundational strength of God's presence to the people. He seeks a way of expressing it. So he speaks of that upon which we stand - the land. Our home, our place, our responsibility, the texture and shape of our being earth-bound creatures - in celebration of which, somehow in the background there is a sense of singing - like maybe somewhere in God's imagination the mountains and valleys themselves have broken into song.

Dealing with the line that lies between beauty and destructiveness, dealing with the line between home and change, dealing with the rock becoming the pebble, the land is part of the picture.

Musical Reflection: Extract from "Finlandia"
Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

The Third Lesson: John 4: 4-14

A Reflection: Rivers

Through the land flows the braided river. Ever moving, ever branching then coming together again, it flows from the source to the destination. And with the water comes life.

Jesus is sitting by a well - the place that people come for water, that they may live. Even that Samaritans come that they may live. Ancient grievances, deep running suspicions, no love at all between Samaritans and this Jewish man by the well. But still she comes for water, for whether you're Samaritan or Jew, you need water to live. She names the ancient enmity: "how is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" He wants to speak to her of a new life - where people don't need to hate one another, and where a new, unified, nourished humanity is formed. How will he speak to her of this? He talks about water - a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. A water which once imbibed will quench thirst forever. Drink and be changed. Drink and be reconciled. Drink and receive life.

When God reaches out to humanity, to touch its division and brokenness, water becomes part of the picture. A braided river flows through this thing we call home. A braided river runs through how and where we stand. A braided river

connects the scary, beautiful mountain to the wide open sea. The river, God's river, is God's flowing life.

For the sky, the land, the river, for the whole beautiful picture, thanks be to God.

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