

## Sermon Archive 209

Sunday 22 July, 2018

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lesson: Ephesians 2: 11-22

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



*In this sermon, some mention is made of Joseph. Joseph is 8 months old and was baptised at Knox just prior to the sermon.*

*Immediately before the sermon, I played a brief video clip. Readers should refer to it, since some references in the sermon might seem strange without knowledge of the clip.*

[https://www.facebook.com/TED/videos/10160661025090652/UzpfSTY1Nzk0NjAwOToxMDE1NTM4OTM0NTk1NjAxMA/?fref=pb&hc\\_location=friends\\_tab](https://www.facebook.com/TED/videos/10160661025090652/UzpfSTY1Nzk0NjAwOToxMDE1NTM4OTM0NTk1NjAxMA/?fref=pb&hc_location=friends_tab)

-ooOoo-

Some words for Joseph as he launches into life.

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Grace and peace be with you Joseph. Welcome to the human condition. I'm sure you'll enjoy it; there's certainly plenty to be enjoyed. There's that whole physical domain thing. The sun shining on your face, the feeling of grass beneath your feet, mud between your toes, tiredness of the limbs after hard work in the garden. For some of us, the odd ones called golfers, there's the satisfaction of putting the little white ball into the black little hole. For others there's the climbing of mountains or the executing of the perfect pirouette. There's the painting of the lovely scene, or the singing of the perfect note. There's the wonder of growth and the great confusing mystery of becoming an adult. There's the tenderness of touch that says "I love you". There's the friend's embrace. And even when there's no need to say anything, there's the beauty of simply being there - the physical presence, the quiet company. I don't know, Joseph, just yet who or what you'll be. But I know that being a human being - which you are - is a wonderful thing - such that the old people said in olden days that we carried the

image of God. Your life is a gift and the possibilities of “becoming” are huge. There are so many stories that could be told of human beings - rich, diverse, kind, responsible. Welcome to the human condition. Grace and peace be with you.

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Grace and peace be with you Joseph. Welcome to . . . I’m not quite sure what to call it. This one is complicated. It won’t be long before you meet someone who is different from you. God makes us in all shapes and sizes, all abilities and hues. Some are straight and some are gay. Some are Jewish and some are Muslim. Some are left and some are right. Some are capitalist and some are communist. There are many different human stories being told. And while you might think, in your infant innocence, that that’s a fabulous tapestry of experience and tradition, a vibrant symphony of difference, it’s not going to be that simple. Because the truth is, Joseph, that you will find we often don’t celebrate the different. Difference becomes something we stumble over. Paul looks to his community and he sees the circumcision and the un-circumcision. He sees two groups, strangers and aliens. He sees people he can only describe as far off from one another. There is no peace. There is no unity. All is division. And the critique from Nigeria is that it’s because we fail to hear the many stories of the people around us. How is it that the African speaks English? How is it that her tribal music is Mariah Carey? How is it that she’s not fighting, dying of AIDS, waiting for a white person to rescue her? (Show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become. Not us.) The peril of the single story. Mexicans are drug dealers and rapists, so better build a wall. (Far off.) Muslims are terrorists, so we’d better ban them travelling. (Strangers and aliens.) Maori are stone age-mentality, so we’ll call upon National Radio not to broadcast in Te Reo. (This is my radio station - no rangimarie for you.) The house of humanity is coming apart - like something whose foundation is broken - the lintels are crumbling - better keep clear.

I can’t tell you why, Joseph. But history, repeats and repeats again - we don’t do difference well. So sadly, my welcome to you is welcome to a mystery, a challenge, a recurring experience of defeat. The ancient wisdom says it’s simple: love God, love your neighbour. We

come again and again with the clever but shameful question “but who is my neighbour?” As if satisfies the requirement. As you grow, you will meet people who are different - and the world won't always help you attend to that in a holy way. So welcome to the broken human family, Joseph. Grace and peace be with you.

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Grace and peace be with you Joseph. A third welcome for you; welcome to this subversive thing called “the body of Christ.” One day you were baptised into it, and drowned in its power and grace. The people who welcomed you that day didn't look like freedom fighters, subversives, saboteurs. They looked . . . well . . . very nice, like people from Christchurch. They each had their own story to tell. Birth, youth, age, experience. Seeking, finding, growing, losing. Hoping, winning, fearing, falling. Shaking, building, doubting, believing. Some had stories of privilege, others of hardship. Some had stories of wisdom, yet also of folly - some of wisdom through folly. Many stories made them a rich, complex tapestry. Yet also in their story, way back in their common ancestry was a further story which was theirs: the story of a child of God, who built from people a new and living temple for God to live in, to be worshipped in, from which to bless. He was a person who took all the old divisions (circumcision, uncircumcision, Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free, all strangers and aliens), and made one body. In his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, putting to death the old hostility, bringing hope to those who were far and those who were near - that he might create in himself one new humanity, thus making peace.

That was sufficiently part of their story that this nice group of Christchurch people (and one or two from Dunedin) became something other than they immediately seemed. They *did* become freedom fighters, people of the resistance. In their own sometimes quite quiet ways, they defied the culture of division. They welcomed people of difference. They protested the building of walls. They put rainbow flags on their tables. They said “No, the treaty is important!” They wrote letters when families were separated at the borders. They said “if you were made by God, then we are one”. So Joseph,

whatever your story, whoever you are, whatever you will grow to be, there is a greater story of how you will always belong here. You are part of the beautiful temple that Christ is building. We defy the dividers. We celebrate what God has done. So welcome Joseph; grace and peace are with you.

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Grace and peace be with you Joseph. A fourth welcome to you; welcome to childhood. We realise you're a child. So we don't expect you to take up the protest just now. No need yet for you to be strong and brave and true. We'll do the subverting for you, the defying, the freedom fighting. We'll do the reconciling, the challenging, the new-creating. We think at this stage you should just eat, drink, play, laugh, sleep, and be delightful. We're pretty sure that that is God's will for you now. So you get on with that task - while we avail ourselves to God to be a temple in which you can find nurture, and the slow, loving fashioning of the image of God within you. We'll try, for you, to be our better selves, to hope, to love, to have faith. We'll try to welcome the stranger and celebrate the different. We'll carry on telling the deep stories, the connecting stories, the redeeming and uniting stories we know are true. And we'll keep a place for you here at this table. Grace and peace be with you Joseph. You are welcome here.

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Those were some words for Joseph near the beginning of his life. I think it's been made abundantly clear that he is welcome. Do other people know that **they** are? Lest there be any misunderstanding, let me speak to you from the story of Jesus. Whoever you are, no matter what the world has said to you, no matter what doubts and difficulties have accompanied you as you have come to this "now", God welcomes you. You are welcome here. Grace and peace be with you.

A moment of quiet.