

Sermon Archive 211

Sunday 5 August, 2018

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lesson: John 6: 24-35

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



There you are Jesus. We wondered where you'd got to. We had to come right across the lake to find you. It was a bit of a job, but we hope it's been worth it. You see, you gave us food yesterday, and as the hunger pangs set in this morning, . . . well, it just made sense. Did you know that we, the whole family of humanity, as we stand on this earth, are hungry. Well, not all of us. Some of us are very well resourced indeed - fine dining, silver service, crystal glasses. But 11% of us will be hungry today - 815 million. 23% of our children under the age of five are stunted - shorter and smaller than they should be because of malnutrition. 36 million of us will die this year of starvation - so yes, in a world with plenty of food, we're hungry. We've found also, Jesus, that these days too, we're having to deal with the dissolution of our old images of hunger and our myths about the hungry. In the olden days hunger was something suffered by others in far away places. When it happened closer to home, to people who looked more like us, it was generally because of laziness or bad decisions. But now some of the children going hungry are here, in our cities. And they belong to parents who are working two or three jobs. Nobody seems to have made a poor decision. Certainly nobody's remotely in danger of being lazy. Nor can we blame it on a drought or a military conflict. There's none of that. But the children are hungry. The old people are hungry. While the evidence seems to be that there's enough food being grown, and indeed while a third of the food produced each year for human consumption gets thrown away (1.3 billion tonnes is thrown away), the people are hungry. So, like we say, it just made sense to seek you out. There you are Jesus; will you feed us?

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There you are Jesus. We wondered where you'd got to. We had to come right across the lake to find you. It was a bit of a job, but we hope it's been

worth it. You see, you tell us the old stories from long ago - those stories about where we've come from, and who we are. You help us go back to the legends and adventures we used to love to hear when we were small - when the world was a bit more full of story, when our eyes opened just a little wider with excitement as the tales were told. We're not quite sure why we love to hear the old stories. Is it something like tip toeing into the darkened meeting house, the wharenuui? Looking at the rafters, seeing the names of our ancestors painted on the thing that shelters us and almost breathes? Feeling like we belong in the story. Feeling like we fit within the tradition? See, here you're doing it now! Reminding us of one of our old stories - our people journeying through the desert, learning every morning as they gather up the bread from the ground, learning of the promise being kept, of the people being fed, of the love that provides. It's just encouraging, good for the spirit. To hear the old story, and know that we're its next chapter. We're part of the story of sustenance and keeping. That's hope for today. That's knowing who we are. That's identity and nurture. Jesus, we know what happens when people lose their identity - or have it stolen. We've heard of stolen generations in Australia. We've seen the disappearance of Maoritanga as great waves of rural people were swept into the machinery of the cities and the language was forgotten. It's sad when **that** happened to **them**. And yet we kind of know, Jesus, that it's not only happening to **them**. Even behind the eyes of those who look confident and "on point", doubts and insecurities dwell. Who am I? How do I fit? Where do I belong? It's a postmodern condition liked and multi-friended on facebook. So yes, Jesus; you tell us the old stories, and say "this is for you". So, like we say, it made sense to seek you. There you are; will you feed us?

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There you are Jesus. We wondered where you'd got to. We had to come right across the lake to find you. It was a bit of a job, but we hope it's been worth it. You see, we were really taken by what you did with the bread and fish - feeding five thousand. Obviously you can't have the whole five thousand in the very front row, getting a front row view. Most of the thousands have only heard what happened - and found the food turning up. So of course you've got some insisting that it was magic - a flourishing defiance of the natural order. Some prefer the word "miracle". Some are

saying no, your generosity triggered the generosity of others, a miracle of the turning of the heart, of the opening of the hands (“if **he** can be generous, then **I** can be generous”). Others are saying it’s nothing but “mass hysteria”. And others are saying it’s all a story, a metaphor, a creation of an inspired people to describe the generous One you believe in. Communities produce theories in abundance! So some of us are here to ask you about it - to seek understanding about something that so far eludes us. Some are here for entertainment - because life is dull without a bit of mystery. Some are here because we know there’s more things in heaven and earth than in Horatio’s philosophy - and they just don’t know. Seeking the mysterious. Seeking the numinous. Stretching towards the transcendent. Trying to utter in ineffable. Yes, the communist critique could be true: that religion is really just the people’s opium. The rationalist might be correct - that what we see and touch is all there is. The nihilist could be on to something: that God is dead and we’d better just wise up to it. But people light candles. And people say prayers. And people look at stars, and people read scripture. That sense of eternity draws people across lakes to continue the conversation - to ask the question - to dream of bread that does not perish. So like we say, Jesus; it made sense to seek you. There you are; will you feed us?

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There you are Jesus. We wondered where you’d got to. We had to come right across the lake to find you. It was a bit of a job, but we hope it’s been worth it. You see, how should I put this? Once upon a time I convened two church committees. And one day both committees had a role to play in some unimportant, tedious matter. And each committee had to refer to the other. And because there had to be a record, a paper trail in the filing cabinets of each committee, I had to write myself a letter. I put one hat on, wrote the letter and put it on the desk. I then put on another hat, picked the letter up and read it. I had to admit it was a very well written letter. Accurate, dull, appropriate to the need. I then wrote a reply to myself and sent it back.

Another one of us works on the checkout of a supermarket. He sometimes stands at his checkout, ready to help, to do his thing -

watching people go through the self-checkouts just over there. As he watches people dealing directly with the machine, replaced by a machine, not chosen while the machine is chosen, does he wonder about the value of his work?

Then there are the ones in the factory, making totally unnecessary single-use plastic things that end up in a turtle's nostril, round a sea gull's neck, micro-bead clogging the anus of a fish. Worthy work? Worthwhile work? A good contribution to the life of the world?

When we look at **your** work, your new art of carpentry, something in us stirs. We want to do God's work - work that matters, and dignifies, and blesses and makes a difference - a positive difference. We want our lives to serve something high, something deep. We want heart and mind and hand and foot and eye and ear and mouth to serve something more than routine and plastic.

Longing for meaningful deployment of our powers, longing for meaningful use of the gift of our life, it just made sense to seek you. There you are; will you feed us?

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There you are Jesus. We wondered where you'd got to. We had to come right across the lake to find you. It was a bit of a job, but it is becoming clear to us, that it has been worth it. For here you are, before us, calling yourself the bread we seek. Here you are, giving us not just bread, not just wine, but your very self. You say "All that I am I give you, all that I have I share with you. Whatever the future brings, I will love, honour and cherish you. Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you." **That** is what you say - and that is how we are fed.

We came for bread. You give us your self. Food. Identity. Nurture. Belonging. Mystery. Wonder. The holy transcendent. Meaningful work. More than the machine. Love. Grace. Life. We came for bread . . .

We keep a moment of quiet.

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