

Sermon Archive 213

Sunday 26 August, 2018

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lesson: John 6: 56-69

Preacher: Rev. Glenn Livingstone



As we move away from plastic, to more sustainable options like paper, how can we re-package the bread, the gospel, in a way to ensure its sustainability going into the future?

The Parish of which I am a member, St. Albans Uniting, currently has a vacancy. Hugh, who was our Minister, has now retired here with Raewyn. So we've been going through the preparation process for new ministry with the Presbytery. This has entailed preparing a Parish Profile, a document which captures who we are and what our vision for the Parish is.

And what I've found quite significant about that is that the Breakfast Church, which gathers prior to the 10 AM service, is described as a Congregation – not as another community-facing activity or regular event but as a Congregation. To me, this elevates the priority of the Breakfast Church for both the next Minister and the 10 AM congregation. This sends a signal that the place of the younger generations in the life of St. Albans is as equally significant as the place of the older generations at the 10 AM service.

It speaks to me of a Parish that is determined to pass the faith on and that in its determination, it will ensure that the Bread of Life is packaged in a way that is accessible to those younger generations. It's the same bread – but in a different package.

And it's a question for every congregation to face – how can we re-package the Bread?

It's a question also for the wider church – how can we re-package the Bread in 2018, for a world which hungers on so many levels?

For you and me, along our life's journey, there has been feast and famine, doubt and decisiveness. But there's probably a fair chance that we are here today because we have come to know of the bread that has sustained us along the way. We have

known of that which nourishes us, which satiates our hunger, represented by Communion, the bread that fills our hunger and the drink that quenches our thirst.

For a long time, it has been our daily bread. For many, it is still their daily bread and for many, it is not. They have not known of it, rejected it out of bad experience or found it hasn't lived up to the expectations they've had of it.

But in what I call our post-modern eftpos-McDonaldsed world, in which the demand and the supply is for everything in the fast and now, the longing for the bread is as acute as ever. And no amount of "*would you like fries with that?*" is going to satiate our world's longing for its most basic needs.

This past week, the ongoing issue of mental health needs has presented itself. I travelled to Palmerston North last weekend for a cousin's reunion. I need to generalise a bit here, so to protect people's privacy. But suffice to say, I was staggered at the situation facing someone close to me. And further staggered at the resources or not, to cope with it.

I found out that, in the main centres in the lower half of the North Island that bed room is so depleted for young mental health patients that one of the options presented to this person close to me was a mattress on the floor of one of the units in the main centres.

I had assumed that mental health needs were the highest in Christchurch, given what this city has been through over the last few years. But I am staggered at the reports and information I am receiving in the rest of the country.

Just this last week, as many of you know, well-known TV presenter Greg Boyed died suddenly. His family issued a statement saying that he battled depression. He was 48 years old.

I'm not a health professional and I'm not going to pretend to be one. But it strikes me that the tactic of not talking about suicide in case it encourages it, isn't working.

We're not talking about it and it's still happening. Where we are progressing is that we, I think, are talking more openly about depression, which is good.

One of New Zealand's most famous artists, Tim Finn, put his to lyric in the Split Enz song,

'Dirty Creature.'

*'Dirty Creature come my way
from the bottom of a big black lake
Shuffles up to my window
making sure I'm awake
S'probably gonna pick my brain
Got me in a vice-like grip
He said one slip, your dead. Ha.*

*Dirty Creature of habit
Little horror here to stay
Anyone in his right mind
would tell it to go away
but the river of dread runs deep
full of unspeakable things
The creature don't mess around
I don't want to mess with him*

*I don't want to sail, I don't want to sail
I don't want to, I don't want to sail tonight
Dirty Creature's got me at a disadvantage from the inside.'*

There are so many in Christchurch and in our country in the grip of the Dirty Creature, who has got them in a vice-like grip. That song was released in 1982 – that's 36 years ago. And it's only now that we are beginning to open up about something that has many of us in its grip, across the spectrum of well-ness.

Sorry, New Zealand male but your Rugby/Soldier identity, first named for me by Professor John Bluck, former Dean of the Cathedral here in Christchurch and my and Matthew's pastoral theology lecturer, your time is up, it is time for you to retire. Because with the greatest of respect, that archetypal Kiwi male, with its truncated emotions, has been a fundamental part of what it is to be a New Zealand male. But it has to go. It is killing us, literally. There is little room still, for the man who is not like that.

That includes the church.

Part of the unresolved sexuality and leadership debate in our church has its foundations in those in the wider Presbyterian Church who find the prospect of any males not fitting their template of what a Kiwi male is supposed to be, terrifying. All these years, we've been on the receiving end of the projections of their insecurities. And it's damaged us and our families.

Reference points for this stereotyping have of course come from our social milieu – our social setting.

John Kirwan's speaking out from a rugby context at the highest levels is awe inspiring.

In days of old, when All Blacks scored tries, they didn't celebrate, they simply trudged back to half-way with their heads down. Celebrating was not the Kiwi male thing. It was

not about you, it was not about showing emotion. These days, the All Blacks hug, some hongi, emotion is palpable.

But open or not, the rugby/soldier archetype is so embedded in Kiwi male identity that there is little room to safely be someone else. How, in New Zealand, can we grow the 'good young men' that the late Celia Lashlie used to talk about?

How can we re-package the Bread, so that we can reach out to our young men, our young women, our wider community, with the bread that is the true food?

One of the readings today is from Ephesians and it talks about the struggles within and our attempts to protect ourselves from them. Today's Psalm, part of which was in the Call to Worship, talks of the peace of Christ and the soul, heart, flesh, the Psalmist's whole being. It talks of the sparrows finding a nest. In other words, a home.

With the Council's Housing First Homeless Project, which is off to an encouraging early start, housing 17 chronically homeless, it isn't about simply finding someone a house. It is about finding them a home in the sense of a place in society. Where their needs are attended to, having come from a place where those fundamental needs, as Maslow would identify them in his hierarchy of needs, have not been met. The needs which you and I must have met, if we are going to survive. The needs which, in being met, able us to delight in life, as the

Psalmist elsewhere tells. At the moment, much of our society is living from take-away to take-away.

That is not sustainable. No amount of *'would you like fries with that?'* is going to keep us going.

Only the real Bread will satiate us, will fill us, will sustain us; amen.

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