

Sermon Archive 212

Sunday 9 September, 2018

Knox Church, Christchurch

Spring Flower Readings & Reflections

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



A Lesson: Genesis 2: 8-9, 15-17

A Reflection: Living in the Garden

It is a beautiful garden - pleasant to the sight and good for food. No better environment could have been made for the flourishing, for the good living of the human being. Not just the practical needs of stomach and nourishment, but colour, aroma, shape - natural beauty to delight the eye and linger in whatever capacity we have for gratitude. It's like God had picked a posy, worked it together, and given it to us, saying "this is for you, I love you". We blush, we break the eye contact, we silently love what has happened. Presented with beauty, met with gift, it's good to be human, a creature of God.

There is, within the garden though, something complicated, a particular tree. Beautiful and good, just like the rest of the garden. Given by God, just like the rest of the garden. Living, growing, alive, just like the rest of the garden. Unlike the rest of the garden, look but do not touch. Unlike the rest of the garden, don't go near. Unlike the rest of the garden, this tree requires of us a certain restraint, a certain exercise of moral responsibility. "Eat it and die" may be an exaggeration. Truer is "eat it and fall". You get the idea.

When vast swathes of South American rainforest is cleared, and the temperature goes up for everyone, have we eaten and fallen? When the jungles of Sumatra are turned to fields of palm oil - such that the light in the eye of the tiger goes out, and the man of the forest is displaced - have we eaten and fallen? When a walking track is cut across the grasses of Ngati Kahungunu, defacing the face of the ancestors, have we eaten and fallen?

It is a beautiful garden, requiring from the guardians a spiritual maturity. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

Music for Reflection

A Lesson: Isaiah 11: 1-2

A Reflection: The Stump and the Shoot

It is not a tree - just a stump. Cut off, prevented. Burned, ended. It **was** a living thing, but no longer is. It's become an expression of what did not work, was not nurtured, suffered unnatural violent curtailment. Chop it, burn it, end it.

There are many stories that could be told. The people of Israel taken off in to exile, their cities and vineyards left in smouldering ruins. The ovens of the final solution cranking up for work in the morning. The ashes of Hiroshima - the knowledge that Death for the world is possible. Ash, a charred stump, a cancelling of life.

Yet such is grace, such is life, such is faith, such is **God**, that from the burnt and ever-ended stump, a small green shoot comes forth. Where did it come from? How could something have survived? For that tomb looked full of death and utterly convinced. A little green shoot comes forth, a branch starts growing. And soon there will be words of spirit and wisdom, of understanding and counsel and might. Soon there will be knowledge, respect, and hope.

In our part of the world, on winter trees, in shoots pushing through the soil into light of day, reminders are being given, gifted to us, of life that says "no" to death. Echoes of Easter. Little demonstrations in nature of the mystery and scandal of resurrection. In all its green, soft, tender new greenness, God says "be not afraid, I am with you always".

Amid history's many discouragements and endings, the people of God see a green shoot growing. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

Music for Reflection

A Lesson: Acts 5: 27-32

A Reflection: The empty tree

There was a tree, press-ganged into tears. Kidnapped into a function so perverse, who could have thought it up? To become a scaffold. To become an instrument of pain. To function as a stick upon which to hoist an innocent man for public ridiculing. The use to which we put God's beautiful creations is baffling - but not a secret. Everyone saw the One from Nazareth nailed to the

tree. So Peter says to those who would have the story hushed up, kept quiet, “No, this is what was done. This is who was killed. This is he who was hung upon the tree - the blood is here - on this tree, in the soil beneath this tree”. So Peter says.

In the winter, the tree is bare, the branches are empty. No one is there. **He** is not there. Every bare winter tree speaks to its kidnapping, and says “He is not here”. You killed him, but the God of our ancestors . . .

So it is from the winter absence, from the empty bareness, that new life emerges. And as the Spring comes, the trees that said “he is not here” now say “here is life”. In the cycles of nature there is resonance with the story of the One who lives, and lives eternally. In the cycles of Springtime, miracle is expressed. Rejoice in the coming again of life. Rejoice in the life of Christ; and hear, you people of God, what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

Music for Reflection

A Lesson: John 15:1-5a

A Reflection: In the Vine

Growing in the garden of the new creation is a vine. Its branches grow this way and that - growing in their own way, stretching into places where there is light. Branches of this shape and that, branches related more or less directly to others - each giving character, presence, reality in time and space to the vine. Each being fed from the vine whose roots are set deep within the deep. “I am that vine”, Christ says, “and you, you are the branches”. And with that, life is no longer an achievement. It is a gift, fed from beyond. And with that, life is no longer a solitary exercise; it is a communal experience. It is not just that I am part of something bigger than myself. It is that **we** are. We, together, all of us, are part of something bigger than **ourselves**.

In the Springtime, as branches stretch and grow, as they receive life from that which unites them and is bigger than they are, Christ speaks of abiding in God, abiding in a fruitfulness that cannot come out of separateness. Christ speaks of a new community, a new creation, a new beauty. And some

of those who hear these words will go out from their church with flowers for others - isolated others who still are part of the vine, part of the new community that God is building. No separate life. No closed door or parted company. But living in the vine - being one in the vine - finding life in the vine. As Springtime comes, as life wakes up, and life touches life, might the Spirit be speaking to the Church?

Prayer:

In the things of Spring,
you speak, Spirit of God.
You speak of the good creation,
of our care-needing place within it.
You speak of the endings we all thought were final,
confronted by newness and growth.
You speak of the risen One
hanged on a tree but raised again to life,
he is not here - he lives and moves out there.
You speak of your grafting us
with care and commitment
into a fruitful being together,
a being with Christ,
a being with others in the living vine.

We bless you for your Springtime,
and its power to speak of eternal things.
All praise and worship are yours,
in Jesus Christ,
Amen.

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