

Sermon Archive 217

Sunday 14 October, 2018

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lesson: Mark 10: 17-27

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Rex, sometimes given as a Christian name, is a Latin word meaning “king”. David is a Hebrew name. It means “the beloved”. Chris, of course is short for Christopher. An entertaining little quirk about Chris is that 80% of the time I type it, I end up adding a final “t” to it - (involuntary movement of my right index finger) - my ordinary correspondent Chris becoming Christ. The name Lazarus is used twice in the gospels, the first referring to the brother of Mary and Martha (the man three days dead). The second Lazarus comes from a wee parable about a poor man, ignored by a rich man, but welcomed into heaven. Anyway, there it is. Here’s a series of letters between Rex, Chris, and David, with a wee note at the end from Lazarus. It’s a parable in correspondence.

-ooOoo-

A letter from Chris to Rex, concerning David.

Dear Rex,

Thank you for helping me sort this out. It feels strange attending to a will when there’s so much life going on. Spirited conversations, deepening friendships - a real sense of beginning to make sense of it. Food shared, pearls found, stories told, life touching life. Life, life; so much life it’s strange to think about death. But, I guess I need to be sensible - death and taxes, and all that! One needs to be ready. I guess the main thing motivating me is David. I love him so much, and I just want to make sure that he’ll be OK. So I’d like to leave him everything I can. He’s a good boy, Rex. He’s always tried hard. Generally he does pretty well. But even when he doesn’t, he’s still my David.

I imagine I’m making you smile now, Rex. Of course my David’s special - not that I’m biased! And you’re right; if you put him into a room of others he’d kind of blend in - looking pretty much like any ordinary human being. Although, maybe that’s not true. I think you’d pick him out, because you’re really perceptive that way. If there was a mannerism, an expression, an action reflecting me, you’d pick it - because you know me well. If something of me, some influence of mine, were to glimmer in him, you’d

see it. And maybe you'd understand how I love him.

Anyway, if you could just note my decision to leave all that I have to David, that would be good. Thanks for your help with this.

With deep appreciation, Chris.

A letter from David to Chris, concerning an insecurity.

Dear Chris,

I can't think of any natural way into this letter, so I'll just put it out there. Lately I've been thinking about life. I think I've been thinking mainly because of you. Your life has a provocative kind of goodness to it. I can't quite explain it, but it's almost like I feel I'm learning something as I watch you. I can't tell you *what* I'm learning - but it feels like I'm being taught, being in the presence of a teacher. I'm sorry if that's a bit embarrassing for you to hear. Feel free to tell me to bugger off. It's just that I feel like I want to be sure that I'm using my life the right way. I know it won't last forever, this life. Life's a finite resource. I just want to know at the end of it all, I've got the most out of it - haven't wasted it.

I've long felt that a big part of it's how we deal with others. From really early on I've tried to take care to treat others well. And I think by the classical standards I've ticked most of the boxes. Don't kill. Don't be unfaithful. Don't steal or lie. Don't commit fraud, and look after your parents. I've not fallen into any of those major holes. And yet . . .

I don't know how to put it. There's still a question mark. Still a suspicion. Still a sub-surface concern that this isn't the actual path into the future - isn't quite goodness and life. And when I look at you - your way with people - my way seems all the more clunky. Too box-ticky, too mechanical, too obedient. Yours is *goodness*. Yours is *Spirited*. Yours feels like "what life is really for". I know I'm missing something important - looking past something important, not seeing, not noticing, not possessing.

Do you get what I mean? Sorry this is such a shambles.

With admiration and anticipation, David.

A letter from Chris to David, concerning a challenge.

Dear David,

I admire you for your letter. It can't have been easy to write.

As I read your thoughts about the way you've tried to treat other people, and how

treatment of other people is important, I found myself smiling. You sounded just like my friend Rex. He's really big on the sensible advice like "just don't kill anyone" - he tangata, he tangata, he tangata. I think you'd enjoy meeting Rex. Maybe one day. I'm pretty sure he already knows about you.

To others who have spoken to me about worries, I've tended just to say "don't worry". "Flowers don't worry. Birds don't worry. Don't **you** worry" I've said. Of course they carry on worrying, because that's what we do, isn't it? But for you, here's something a little bit different. It's in keeping with your hunch that people are important, and that there's meant to be a rightness, a respect, a bit of a blessing from God, when life touches life. And you've been operating on that hunch, as you've said, from your youth. And that constant practice has brought your heart very much into the right kind of place - seeking, longing, wondering. But now, as you say, you know there's something missing - something you lack. Goodness, life, anxiety, a lack.

David, beloved, sell everything you have, give it to the poor, and come and follow me.

With love, Chris.

A letter from David to Rex, concerning a letter from Chris.

Dear Rex,

I don't know whether I'll send you this letter - but it seems right just now to write it. I've been talking to Chris, whom I believe you know. He admires you greatly, thinks you're wise. And I admire **him** greatly, and think **he's** wise. But I'm struggling with his advice. He's told me to sell everything I have, and give it away to the poor. But I'm scared that . . . I'm just scared. To face a future with nothing in my hands . . . To face a future with empty pockets . . .

I've got this concern not to waste my life; and this "giving of things away" seems frighteningly wasteful. I'm scared for my future. What must I do?

Kind of "in confidence", but most sincerely, David.

A letter to David from Rex - maybe in the form of the hearing of a prayer, or the lighting of a candle, or the coming of a morning.

Dear David,

Don't worry about the future. Provision has been made.

Much love, Rex.

P.S. Did you know that your name means “the beloved”?

P.P.S. You ask what you can do. It’s kind of the wrong question. Provision has been made. I’d listen to Chris.

A letter from Lazarus to Rex.

Dear Rex,

I don’t expect you to reply to this. It’s not really your concern.

I’m poor. I really struggle. And not just economically - although it’s certainly an economic struggle. I’ve got nothing but bills and a sense of failure. And it’s that sense of failure that really kicks. I can’t remember the last time anyone did something kind to me. And the thing is, I don’t expect kindness. When you’re a failure, you don’t expect anything. Life teaches you not to expect. The low expectations of a man three days buried.

A curious non-event didn’t happen the other day. I was there, in my need, in that strange state of being visible and also invisible. This man came by me. I think his name was David. He looked well loved, and I knew he had the capacity to love as well. I know he saw me. He saw me. And walked on by.

Am I not loved? Has no provision been made? How can one receive news that provision has been made, love has been pledged, fear for the future has been removed, and no hand be extended?

Chris will talk about camels and the eyes of needles. Chris will lament. Chris will also say “for mortals some things are impossible, but not for God; for God *all* things are possible”.

So Rex, into your hands we place this impossible possibility. Speak to it and us. Direct the camels towards the needles, and batter the human heart. What can we do? What must we do?

Lord have mercy,

from Lazarus.

Post script to the sermon.

And Rex said . . .

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