

Sermon Archive 221

Sunday 11 November, 2018

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lessons: James 3: 13-18
Mark 3: 3-8

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



The scheduling needs of this anniversary day require that this sermon be brief. With little time to weave images or get poetic, it may turn into something fairly direct. It is good, then, that sometimes God dwells well in directness.

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There are two readings. In the first someone taking the name of James tells us that the goal is a harvest of righteousness, sown in peace for those who make peace. He also notes that we seek the goal in a world where some are envious and ambitious, where disorder is normal, and where people are stupid. He suggests that real wisdom is pure, gentle, merciful and willing to yield. Willing to yield? Is willingness to yield part of that wisdom we are called to seek?

In the second reading we have Jesus sitting with the disciples on the mount of Olives. Are they taking time out - having climbed up a hill to take maybe a bird's eye view of the world they live in? Who knows, but they do seem to be asking the big question: where's this all going? When are we going to get there? How will we know?

Jesus says to them "when you hear about wars, or rumours of wars" (rumours? Are we at war or not? Surely we'd know), when you hear about wars, don't be alarmed. It's just bound to happen. From this something will grow - something will be born. It'll be like earthquakes and famines. It won't be good. Nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom (which is our kingdom?). But the important thing, the thing over which you must be careful, is that amid it all you don't go astray.

Whatever you do, in the rumour and alarm, don't be led astray.

Those are our two readings. The wisdom of yielding. The inevitable reality of war. Dealing with ambition and disorder. Not going astray, losing the way, regretting the day. Keeping the big picture alive of the final harvest of righteousness sown in peace for those who make peace. Peace at the last.

-ooOoo-

I've spoken before about Andrew Denton's interview of Bob Hawke, a former prime minister of Australia. I described Bob's thoughts about the lines that lie between heart and mind - how what really matters, and really motivates, is what we keep in our hearts. And that was a worthwhile reflection. Also in the interview was a question about political compromise. Andrew noted that quite often in politics, politicians end up having to support things they don't really want to support, or saying things they don't really want to say, making concessions. When asked to describe his experience of this kind of thing, Bob confessed to having made concessions, compromises, even to swallowing the odd dead rat. His point was that you can only do that effectively if you keep in your heart and mind the bigger picture. Don't let anything go that ruins or seriously imperils the bigger picture. In fact, within the bigger picture, it can be a useful negotiation tool to remind people, when larger, more important matters are being argued, of the concessions that you were willing to make. Let go of some of the small things, for the sake of seeking the bigger thing. Lose the battle but win the war. Swallow a tiny little mouse for the sake of the harvest. I wonder if that's the wisdom of yielding talked about by James. I wonder if that's the line from Jesus: this must take pace, but the end is still to come. Neither am I sure it is, nor am I sure we'd want to take advice from a politician whose career ended badly in an intra-party coup d'état. That would be the equivalent of taking lessons in wisdom from someone who ended up being crucified. You talk of peace; how did that go for you, Jesus?

I think it's safe to say that whenever a war breaks out, there is a sense of alarm. In using images like earthquakes and famines, Jesus well describes

the sense of alarm. I think it's also safe to say that within that sense of alarm, communities always end up discussing what they're going to do in response. Are we going to fight? Are we going to not fight? What of ourselves are we going to give to this? What are we willing to yield? How are we going to carry on talking about a harvest of righteousness when our hands are dirty, or our hearts are faint? Jesus says these things must take place - just be sure that you don't go astray. Not going astray in the pursuit of peace.

When the guns fell silent at eleven o'clock on the 11th November, one hundred years ago today, a line was drawn under something that had been awful. Thank God it was the war to end all wars - and we'd never have to do it again. The on-going human responsibility though, did not go away - the responsibility to ask of ourselves "had we gone astray?" Had we yielded something we ought not to have? Had an innocent man been crucified? What do we pray, from this might be born? Resurrection? A prayer for the harvest of righteousness? A discerning heart towards wisdom and war and peace?

A hundred years on, a wounded world remembers, and God calls us to a harvest of peace.

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