

Sermon Archive 252

Sunday 7 July, 2019

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lesson: Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



No one knows the facts, of course, but there are **stories**. One's of an Irish monk, Brendan, who feels, with reluctance, but also with an irresistible conviction, that he's being called to search for paradise. He doesn't know where it is, but knows he needs to set sail in search of it. It is said that he climbed a mountain, looked around his home, and prayed this prayer:

Shall I abandon, O King of mysteries, the soft comforts of home? Shall I turn my back on my native land, and my face towards the sea?

Shall I put myself wholly at the mercy of God, without silver, without a horse, without fame or honour? Shall I throw myself wholly on the King of kings, without sword and shield, without food and drink, without a bed to lie on?

Shall I leave the prints of my knees on the sandy beach, a record of my final prayer in my native land? Shall I then suffer every kind of wound that the sea can inflict?

Shall I take my tiny coracle across the wide, sparkling ocean? O King of the glorious heaven, shall I go of my own choice upon the sea?

No one knows the facts, of course, but there are stories. One's of another monk called Columba. Fleeing for his life from those who would kill him, he throws himself into a tiny little boat - a coracle. Room for only one; it's small and circular - no real front, better for turning in circles on shallow rivers than for sailing the ocean. Columba heads out into the wide waters, not knowing where the wind will take him, just hoping it's away from the violence. No provisions. No defences. No plan. No direction. No strategy - just a prayer that God will blow him to where he's meant to be. Journeying into he knows not where, thus he prays:

Great is the speed of my coracle, its stern turned upon Derry. Great is the grief of my heart, my face set upon Alba. My coracle sings on the waves, yet my eyes are full of tears. My heart calls me West, yet I know God blows me East.

Two romantic images of people of faith setting out in trust, seeing where God will take them. What are the facts? Well, those are the stories.

-ooOoo-

Enough with stories! Let's take charge of this thing and impose a bit of structure. Most days I approach the day with a goal, or a set of goals in mind. I have things to achieve, and various steps worked out along the way. I need to manage my world towards those goals; to a degree I need to have dominion over my day. So I have my diary - what will happen, what won't. I have phone calls I need to make, and phone calls I choose not to receive (if they're distractions). I have things I need to ask people to do (or direct people to do). I have tools that help me: my computer, my internet connection, the structure of my workplace, and the social conventions of the community around me that allow me to play the role I do. I'm not a megalomaniac, you understand. I'm not a user of people. But I do manage my time, manage the opportunities, manage my interactions with others. It's better and more productive when I, from within my structures and resources, am the **manager** of my day.

Brendan goes in search of paradise in a boat with no front. Columba jumps in a boat for one, relying for direction only on the wind. Jesus says to the seventy chosen ones "Go on your way . . . Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals. Meet who you meet - let them feed you. Stay while **they** want you to stay. If **they** don't want you to stay, move on. Let **their** welcome, or their indifference determine your day and your stay. See where God takes you. Find what you will find.

We're told that after some time away on the directionless journey, the seventy come back to Jesus with smiling stories about all that they've found. They return with joy, amazed at what's happened to them, around them, through them. This new way of travelling light through the world has been a miracle. Like flashes of lightning, and the falling of stars from

heaven, like the ending of the power of the enemy and the dancing among snakes and scorpions, so has been this “free in the Spirit”, unmanaged day. Who knows about the facts; but this is the story - God blesses the people as they follow the wind.

-ooOoo-

You and I are meeting, and some talking is going on. I have things I want to tell you, and I will work through them one by one. I will be the talker; please you be the listener - or at least be quiet and pretend you’re listening. I may have good things to tell you, that will be useful to you. And I have well established, proven ways of communicating to you. In church it’ll be a three point sermon with a poem and a take-away bullet point, delivered from behind a piece of furniture big enough to give me gravitas. In advertising, it’ll be a package by which I tell you why you’re unhappy and how my product will change your mood. In various theatres of politics, the loudest shouter will prove the point. We will determine to make a point, we’ll made a point, the point will be made, and the talking will be done.

But what if you reply to me with a poem? What if we agree to be together in friendly silence. What if you feel free to tell me about **your** day, and I hear you, and understand? What if I come not to a speaking, but to a conversing? What if I come to you, open to whether you are saying “welcome, have you eaten yet”, or whether you’d rather I wasn’t here? What if I should notice you, your need, and treat that as more important than my mission? What if the day were to be something to be discovered, rather than managed? What if, in the end, I’m not the manager, but we’re the neighbours?

Would lightning flash? Would stars fall from the sky? Would the power of the enemy falter? Would joy make a home among us?

-ooOoo-

Perhaps I should reassure you just now. I have no plans to quit my ministry here, and go off into the wilds of un-structure. Nor do I wish to

burden you with any suggestion that you should tune in, drop out and throw away your purse. That might be a good **story**, but the facts probably wouldn't work. But in search of a new experience of facts of life, consider how you go into this day. As people of faith, perhaps dominion over the day includes travelling lightly, being open to what the day is saying, being willing to let go, or to listen. Perhaps proper management of our day, our days, our life together, is about sensitivity to what God is giving - the people, the conversations, the politely shut doors in our face, the opportunities for gentleness and respect, the moments of listening, the eating together at the table. (If they feed you, eat what they provide; don't run from here to there, but take time to be where it is good and where fruit is growing.) Fact or story? Brendan's got into a boat with no obvious front. Columba's sailing only where God's holy wind is blowing him. Jesus' people are walking barefoot into the day that God is giving. (No! Put it in the diary, set the goal, manage the moment towards the completion of my tasks and impositions! I am right, and you are wrong. I speak, you be silent. I know what you need, and what I need to do to you. We must manage the day and every day! How else are we to make progress, and achieve the kingdom of God?) The kingdom of God? . . .

Is it not here, in the listening - the kingdom of God? Has it not been given in the being one as we eat together? Is it not present to us as the stranger (God's gift to us) says "you are welcome"? No purse. No sandals. No bag. We go on our way to discover the gift already being given - the kingdom of God.

Maybe it's just a story, but Brendan prayed: *Shall I take my tiny coracle across the wide, sparkling ocean? O King of the glorious heaven, shall I go of my own choice upon the sea?*

Jesus calls his people to walk a light and different way.

We keep a moment of quiet.